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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# MATERIALLY FALSE IDEAS IN DESCARTES' MEDITATIONS

BY

© DONNA LYNNE DORSEY

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND

RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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SUBMITTED BY DONNA LYNNE DORSEY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF M.A.

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ABSTRACT

Descartes' account of materially false ideas given in the Third Meditation has been the subject of much debate amongst commentators as to what the nature of a materially false idea is. According to Descartes, material falsity occurs when an idea represents a 'non-thing as if it is a thing.' Confusion about the nature of materially false ideas arises in part from Descartes' notion of the representative character of an idea. It is my argument that Descartes intends all ideas to have representative character, but only in an intramental sense. This means that all ideas will have internal objects of thought, but not all internal objects of thought will be capable of representing external objects of thought.

As a result of my position, I also hold that not all ideas have the property of reality contained objectively in them. Only those ideas which are capable of representing extramental objects of thought will truly contain reality objectively. In the case of materially false ideas, these ideas must both purport to have objective reality and actually lack objective reality. These conditions arise from the obscure and confused content of the materially false idea.

In addition, I hold that Descartes does not intend the internal object of thought of all ideas to be taken as a 'thing'. In contrast to the ususal objects of perception, Descartes intends that some internal objects of thought are to be taken as sensations. When an idea is materially false, namely in those instances

where objective reality is mistakenly ascribed to the content of an idea, the internal object of thought is mistakenly taken to be a thing as opposed to a sensation.

I maintain that Descartes' account of materially false ideas is consistent with his account of the representative character and content of an idea as well his principle of objective and formal reality.

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CHAPTER I

The objective of this thesis is to explicate the concept of a materially false idea as employed in the Third Meditation. Descartes' treatment of this type of idea is scant. Apart from a passage in the Third Meditation (CSM II, 30) [1] and selected passages in the Replies to the Objections, (CSM II, 163–64) no further mention of this concept is made in Descartes' primary works. A materially false idea is closely connected with Descartes' use of the concepts of objective and formal reality and the causality implicit in their relation. Above all, the nature of a materially false idea pertains directly to the way in which an idea, in the Cartesian sense, is said to be a representation of an object.

Descartes' discussion of material falsity constitutes one of the most difficult passages in the Meditations. As a result, there is considerable confusion amongst the critics as to what the nature of a materially false idea is.[2] I will, in this thesis, (i) criticize the commentators' interpretations of Descartes' work (and, therefore, my criticism of Descartes will only be indirect); and I will (ii) argue that, in spite of the terse exposition material falsity receives in Descartes' writings, the doctrine he presents is coherent with his use of the concepts referred to above.

[1] All references in this thesis are to The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol. I & II, (Translated by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, Cambridge U. Press, Cambridge, 1985; hereinafter referred to as CSM, I or II). Where selected passages are direct quotations from sources using the Haldane & Ross translation, the reference will be given as HR, Vol. I & II.)

[2] I will deal with the nature of the materially false idea and not the role it is intended to play in Cartesian epistemology and metaphysics.

1. Introduction of the problem

Due to the brief treatment of this concept, the nature of a materially false idea is obscure. By addressing the issue of the 'nature' of this type of idea, I raise the question of precisely what a materially false idea is. Critics' attempts to describe the nature of a materially false idea have resulted in accusations that Descartes' account of this subject is problematic. It is part of the project of this thesis to provide a reading of Descartes' texts which does not leave us with these problems.

As background to my argument, I will present a brief survey of how selected representative twentieth century English writers[3] up to the mid 1970's have addressed this difficult issue and indicate why they have failed to deal adequately with it. Certain contemporary writers'[4] more extensive or adequate treatment of the issue will then be presented in Chapter II. I will argue against Margaret Dauler Wilson's[5] assertion that an inconsistency exists in Descartes' treatment of the subject of materially false ideas. The outcome of my opposition to Wilson's account will be to explicate the nature of materially false ideas and to exonerate Descartes from the charge of inconsistency levelled by Wilson.

[3] Primarily L. J. Beck, F. Broadie and A. Kenny from selected works and more briefly M. Gueroult. I do not mention Keeling as there is no significant treatment of material falsity in his works.

[4] Namely, M.D. Wilson, V. Chappell, and C. Normore

[5] M. D. Wilson, Descartes, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978), pp. 100–119 (hereinafter referred to as Wilson).

To facilitate this defense of Descartes' position, it is necessary to give a brief outline of Descartes' project in Meditation III. Typically, the arguments presented in Meditation III are considered to be instrumental to the proof of the existence of God.[6] Yet, it is within the Third Meditation that Descartes introduces the concept of a materially false idea, a clear indication that more is at stake than proving God's existence. I will concentrate on that part of Descartes' project which is to establish the objective validity of ideas. Descartes' is required to address this issue in Meditation III as a result of certain conclusions of the previous Meditation.

Descartes' initial metaphysical certainty is established in the Second Meditation with the cogito argument. (CSM II, 17). This certainty is that of the existence of the thinking substance. Apart from the certainty Descartes asserts he attains with regard to the existence of thought, he states an additional certainty of the existence of what he terms 'modes of thinking' within him. (CSM II, 24) This certainty is simply that of an awareness of his specific thoughts. Every other possible certainty is considered an uncertainty. One class of uncertainties for Descartes is the class of facts about the external world, or the existence of some thing distinct from him. The ideas that are particularly uncertain are those that purport to entail the existence of any object apparently known via the senses.

[6] Although this is generally agreed to be the purpose of Meditation III, the commentators that I deal with argue about the difficulty of 'materially false' ideas in reference not only to proving the existence of God, but also in regard to proving the existence of anything else outside the mind.

Descartes' Archimidean point, or first truth, is established in thought. Hence, the enquiry into the existence of any thing apart from thought must, of necessity, be made within thought. Descartes' intention is to argue from the certainty of his thoughts to the certainty of the existence of extramental things, about which these thoughts purport to be. Consequently, his project in Meditation III is to establish the objective validity of his ideas. An idea has objective validity when things are in strict agreement with their clear and distinct conceivability.

Establishing objective validity is essential to Descartes for the following reasons. Firstly, the possibility of knowledge depends on the validity of this procedure.[7] Secondly, as a result of the certainty obtained in the cogito, establishing the objective validity of ideas is important because of the threat of solipsism. Finally, the hypothesis of the evil genius introduced in Meditation I threatens the objective validity of clear and distinct ideas. While the certainty of clear and distinct ideas was established in the case of the cogito, the objective validity of clear and distinct ideas of items apart from the cogito is still subject to doubt.[8] Establishing objective validity will be one of the ways of attaining certainty of clear and distinct ideas of things apart from himself.[9]

[7] In Descartes' reply to Bourdin, he says, '...it is plainly impossible for us to know something unless it really is exactly as we know it to be -- i.e. existing, if we perceive that it exists, or of such and such a nature, if it is merely its nature that we know.' (CSMII, 354) See also J. Cronlin, Objective Being in Descartes and Suarez, (Garland Publishing Inc., N.Y., 1987, pp. 23-24).

[8] L. J. Beck, The Metaphysics of Descartes, (Oxford Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1965) p. 162-63 (hereinafter referred to as Beck).

[9] It will not be part of my thesis to discuss Descartes' hypothesis of the evil genius. However, the refutation of the possible existence of the evil genius will also serve to ensure the certainty of clear and distinct ideas of things apart from himself.

In particular, ideas of sense are poor candidates for objective validity. Descartes takes all of them to be questionable with regard to the certainty they allow one to have about the existence of extramental objects. In Meditation I, Descartes tells us that he has made erroneous judgments in the past based on the information received via his senses. The cogito established it as a certainty for him that the ideas or thoughts of objects supposedly apprehended by means of the senses appeared before his mind.(CSMII, 24). However, in referring these ideas to the existence of things outside himself, Descartes has in the past erred. This prejudice of 'common sense', namely to assume the existence of things apart from himself which correspond to the ideas he has of them, must be distinguished from reason, which ultimately will determine the criterion of truth.

Erroneous judgement based on common sense, as opposed to true judgement based on reason, is described by Descartes' as follows:

> There was something else which I used to assert, and which through habitual belief I thought I perceived clearly, although I did not in fact do so. This was that there were things outside me which were the sources of my ideas and which resembled them in all respects. (CSM II, 25).

From this passage, one might assume that the perception of the extramental origin of his idea and the perception of resemblance between his idea and the extramental object, led to one erroneous judgment. In fact, this does not involve one judgment but two. In order to establish the objective validity of ideas, Descartes must address both questions, namely, (1) is the origin of the idea an extramental object and,(2) if so, does the idea resemble, in all respects, the

extramental object?[10]

Of these two questions, Descartes is particularly concerned with the one of resemblance, for as we shall see, it is only the question of resemblance that settles the issue of objective validity.

> ...the question of objective validity is not necessarily settled by the question of origin... It is [an idea's] conformity with what it represents that constitutes its proper objective validity, not the fact that it is truly produced by an external thing which it might not resemble.[11]

A judgement about resemblance between an idea and its object based on the extramental origin of the idea, will not be founded on reason. Even if ideas did proceed from extramental objects, Descartes tells us '...it would not follow that they resemble those things. Indeed, I think I have often discovered a great disparity <between an object and its idea> in many cases.' (CSM II, 27) [12] As an example of this disparity, Descartes refers to two ideas of the sun. The one obtained through the senses seems the most likely candidate to have originated outside him, while the idea of the sun based on astronomical reasoning seems less likely to have originated from outside him. Even if the sun does exist outside

[10] While there will be ideas of objects with partial resemblance, for example an idea of a hot stove, these ideas are not candidates for objective validity. Objective validity requires a strict agreement between the idea and the object of that idea.

[11] M. Gueroult, Descartes' Philosophy Interpreted According to the Order of Reasons, Vol. I & II (Tr. R. Ariew, U. of Minn. Press, Minneapolis, 1984) p. 115 (hereafter referred to as Gueroult)

[12] The notation of <...> is used in the CSM edition to indicate translations approved by Descartes which provide important material additional to CSM's own translation from the original language.

him, the idea '...which seems to have emanated most directly from the sun itself [the idea acquired through the senses] has in fact no resemblance to it at all.' (CSM II, 27)

While the question of resemblance is of greater importance in resolving the problem of objective validity of ideas, nonetheless, Descartes must address the question of origin of the idea. He claims that the only certainty he has with regard to his ideas at the beginning of the Third Meditation is that they are in him. This means that he clearly perceives that these thoughts or ideas of extramental objects '...appeared before [his] mind.' (CSM II, 24) However, there is more involved in an idea than its attribute as a mode of thought of the thinking substance. The idea received via the senses is an idea 'of a thing', which is to say that the idea has content. This content in an idea must be accounted for, which is to raise the issue of the origin of the idea. Not only does the idea have content but this content is represented within the idea. To say that an idea is an idea 'of a thing' is to say that the idea has representative character, i.e. that it purports to indicate an extra-ideational reality.

Describing an idea as both a mode of thought of the thinking substance and as an entity that has content, raises questions that deal with an issue different from that of the origin of an idea. This is the issue of whether or not an idea is an entity that is ontologically distinct from the substance that is mind. As will be seen in the course of this thesis, I will define an idea as both an object and an act (my awareness of that object). While I will refer to these (object and act) as though they are ontologically distinct, we will see in my second chapter that, for the purposes of my argument, they need be only conceptually distinct entities.

The issue of an idea as an entity distinct from the mind is directly related to the question of whether or not the representational character attributed to Cartesian ideas requires an entity distinct from the mind to do the representing. One available response is to follow the line offered by philosophers such as Yolton [13] and argue that the content of an idea has 'cognitive'(as opposed to 'literal') presence of the object to the mind and that ideas are simply the 'psychic contents of our awareness'. Thus, ideas are not entities separate from the mind. Alternatively, one can follow Kenny [14] and say that, for Descartes, ideas are 'nonmaterial representations of things' but in the case of adventitious ideas, the idea is something distinct from the act or operation of the mind. While an explication of Descartes' doctrine of representation (that is the way in which an idea can be said to be a representation of an object) is essential to an understanding of his treatment of materially false ideas, it is not necessary to commit oneself to the view that ideas are ontologically distinct from the mind in

[13] J. Yolton, Perceptual Acquaintance From Descartes to Reid, (Minnesota, 1984), pp. 32–3 and 73. A part of Yolton's analysis of the problems of perceptual knowledge from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries is the focus upon the opposition between Arnauld and Malebranche, both of whom claimed to be Cartesians. The tension arises between ideas as acts of perception and ideas as contents that are reified. It is Arnauld's position that the mind apprehends an object without the addition of an entity that is represented to the mind. Contrary to Arnauld, Malebranche argues that 'to know external objects, we need to have something united to our mind which is different from our mind, not different in kind but numerically different'. (see Yolton, pp. 58 –73).

[14] A. Kenny, "Descartes on Ideas", Descartes, (Ed. W. Doney, Anchor Books, N.Y., 1967), pp. 239–40 (Hereafter referred to as Kenny).

order to undertake this analysis. Instead, a commitment to the conceptual distinction mentioned above is sufficient. [15]

The central argument of my thesis depends on the illustration of two senses of representation. I will introduce this theory in Sections 2 and 5 of this chapter and develop it in Chapter II. The representational character of an idea is generally regarded as applying to the representative relation between an idea and its extra-ideational object. I will argue that this interpretation of Descartes is not always correct. In particular, the meaning of the representative relation between an idea and its object is misunderstood in discussions of materially false ideas.

[15] It will not be the subject of this thesis to debate the controversy between direct realism and representative realism, namely, whether or not the mind's 'contact' with the object is direct or is mediated by a third entity. I will also not discuss the problem of interactionism for Descartes, that is, how the physical (or that which is not mind) can be translated to the mental (or that which is mind). These issues are both parts of larger epistemological and metaphysical problems which are beyond the scope of this thesis.

## 2. The Representative Character of Ideas

An explication of the nature of a materially false idea necessarily involves some examination of Descartes' theory of ideas. It is beyond the scope of this present project to undertake an exhaustive appraisal of his entire theory of ideas and such a large-scale undertaking is not required for my purposes. Sufficient clarity will result if I limit myself to passages which deal with those ideas Descartes takes to have 'representative character'.

> Some of my thoughts are as it were the images of things, and it is only in these cases that the term 'idea' is strictly appropriate – for example, when I think of a man, or a chimera, or the sky, or an angel, or God. Other thoughts have various additional forms: thus when I will, or am afraid, or affirm, or deny, there is always a particular thing which I take as the object of my thought, but my thought includes something more than the likeness of that thing. Some thoughts in this category are called volitions or emotions, while others are judgements. (CSM II, 25 – 26).

This passage allows me to say that an idea, in the Cartesian 'proper' sense, must be 'like the image of a thing'. Considerable textual support is available to conclude that when Descartes speaks of an image, he does not mean a literal image or picture in the corporeal imagination.[16] Furthermore, the idea is only 'like' or 'as if' an image of a thing, and is not itself an image even in a non-corporeal form.

In addition to being 'like an image of a thing', a thought can also be an action of the mind, as in 'willing' or 'denying'. In these cases, there is something that is added to the object of that particular mental action. In contrast to image-like ideas of things, this class of thoughts is one made up of

[16] see also CSM II, 113, CSM II, 127 and CSM II, 117

composites, namely, an image-like idea of a thing together with a mental action such as 'denial' of that idea. Only of the first class of thoughts can it said be that these non-corporeal image-like ideas of things are operations of the intellect, as opposed to actions of the will.

The distinction between these two classes of thoughts in the Meditations parallels Descartes' classification of two modes of thought in the Principles of Philosophy (CSM I, Pr. 32).

> All the modes of thinking that we experience within ourselves can be brought under two general headings: perception, or the operation of the intellect, and volition, or the operation of the will. Sensory perception, imagination and pure understanding are simply various modes of perception; desire, aversion, assertion, denial and doubt are various modes of willing. (CSM I, Pr. 32, 204)

Not only do ideas, in Descartes' 'proper' sense, have 'representative character', which is to be 'as if' of something; they also belong to the operation of the intellect, and strictly speaking, are perceptions. Those ideas, such as denying and desiring, which are composites, belong to the operation of the will.

Judgement, an action of the will, must be distinguished from the operation of the pure intellect or understanding. While Descartes claims in the Rules For The Direction Of The Mind that '...there can be no truth or falsity in the strict sense except in the intellect alone',(CSMI, 30) we also know that error (formal falsity) belongs to judgement. A false idea, for example, which is mistakenly taken to be a true idea, results in an erroneous judgement.

However, ideas in themselves cannot be false. Falsity can only occur when an idea is referred to something other than the idea itself. Descartes states this in the following way:

> As far as ideas are concerned, provided they are considered solely in themselves and I do not refer them to anything else, they cannot strictly speaking be false; for whether it is a goat or a chimera that I am imagining, it is just as true that I imagine the former as the latter. (CSM II, 26)

An idea, in its mode of being 'as if' of something, cannot strictly speaking be false, according to Descartes. This passage introduces an important distinction between mental and extramental objects of thought. While Descartes is not explicit about this distinction, I maintain it to be essential to a coherent reading of his theory of materially false ideas. The object of thought referred to in the above passage must be interpreted as an internal (or intramental) object of thought. To consider the idea in itself is to consider the idea without reference to the existence of any extramental object of thought. Referring the idea to something other than the idea itself, namely an extramental object of thought, is to bring the idea into the realm of judgement.

Thoughts that are judgements are liable to error. In judgements, '...the chief and most common mistake which is to be found here consists in my judging that the ideas which are in me resemble, or conform to, things located outside me.' (CSM II, 26) This reference to extramental existents is an action of the mind distinct from the operation of the intellect which considers the idea in itself. As we have seen, the idea in this latter mode of thought has content, namely an internal object of thought such as a goat or a chimera. As long as this internal object of thought is not referred to any object which exists distinct from the idea, this thought is not liable to error. 'Of course, if I considered just the ideas themselves simply as modes of my thought, without referring them to anything else, they could scarcely give me any material for error.' (CSM II, 26)

The distinction I have outlined above allows me to conclude the following. When Descartes refers to ideas as being 'like the image of a thing', the idea can be referred to both an internal and an extramental object of thought. He is rarely explicit about the status of the object of thought which he intends and this obscurity is the source of much confusion among commentators.

The representative character of an idea may be related to either an internal object of thought or an extramental object of thought. Thus there are two senses of the 'representative relation' between an idea and its object. These two senses will be described in Section 5 of this Chapter and developed in Chapter II.

As we saw at the end of the previous section, the origin of the idea is of importance because the content of the idea must be accounted for. Yet even if ideas do originate from extramental objects, there is still no reason for thinking that these ideas resemble those things. (CSM II, 26) As noted earlier, Descartes is aware that common sense has misled him in the past in terms of resemblance between an idea and its object.

In addition, common sense could also mislead Descartes about the origin of an idea. Some ideas seem more likely than others to originate outside himself, namely those ideas that seem to come to him against his will. Descartes argues that these ideas cannot depend only on him. For example,

> Frequently I notice them even when I do not want to: now, for example, I feel the heat whether I want to or not, and this is why I think that this sensation or idea of heat comes to me from something other than myself, namely the heat of the fire by which I am sitting. And the most obvious judgement for me to make is that the thing in question transmits to me its own likeness rather than something else. (CSM II, 26)

Such a judgement, however, is not based on reason and lacks certainty to the same degree. For even though ideas of heat, for example, do not depend on his will,

> ...it does not follow that they must come from things located outside me...there may be some other faculty not yet fully known to me, which produces these ideas without any assistance from external things...(CSM II, 27).

Up to this point in the Meditations, Descartes' investigation has failed to provide any reason for his beliefs about both the origin of the content of an idea and the judgement that the idea resembles the object of that idea. An optional avenue of exploration is available to him in terms of the objective and formal reality of ideas, a Scholastic distinction to which I will now turn.

3. Objective and Formal Reality and Causality

As discussed in the previous section, Descartes discovers that common sense is unable to provide answers to the questions of origin of the idea and resemblance of an idea and its object, nor will the question of resemblance be settled by the question of origin. Bearing in mind that his investigation must proceed from within the idea, Descartes turns to the content of the idea, in respect of what differentiates one idea from another.

> In so far as the ideas are <considered> simply <as> modes of thought, there is no recognizable inequality among them: they all appear to come from within me in the same fashion. But in so far as different ideas <are considered as images which> represent different things, it is clear that they differ widely. (CSM II 27 – 28).

From this passage, one can infer that the representative character of ideas are, in part, responsible for differences in the content of ideas. This is to say that an idea has a content that is distinct from another idea, for example, an idea of the sun and another idea of the moon. The numerical distinctness of each idea is, in part, accounted for by the representative character of the idea.

Various kinds of things will be represented in each idea. Of these things, one could be the property or attribute of reality. Descartes tells us that we do not know a thing or a substance directly but we know its attributes or properties.(CSM I, 210, Pr. 52) Reality is one of the properties or attributes of things. It is also one of the attributes or properties that is contained objectively in an idea. This can be rephrased as: If an idea A represents some object X which is F, then F or this F−ness will be contained objectively in the idea A.

However, objective reality (or participation by representation in a degree of being) varies according to the object's degree of ontological dependence or independence. In other words, different ideas have different degrees of objective reality according to what they represent. Descartes holds that 'Undoubtedly, the ideas which represent substances to me amount to something more and, so to speak, contain within themselves more objective reality than the ideas which merely represent modes or accidents.' (CSM II, 28) It therefore follows that it is Descartes' view that reality admits of degrees. And this is what he tells us.(CSM II, 117) The objective reality of an idea is thus defined as

> ...the being of the thing which is represented by an idea, in so far as this exists in the idea. In the same way we can talk of 'objective perfection', 'objective intricacy' and so on. For whatever we perceive as being in the objects of our ideas exists objectively in the ideas themselves. (CSM II, 113−14)

If, for example, we have an idea of the sun, then the sun exists objectively in our idea. This objective mode of being belongs to the idea by its very nature, that is, by representation. (CSMII, 29 and CSM II, 75). Reality, as a property or attribute, has objective existence in the idea in the form of objective reality.

The objective reality of an idea refers to the contents of the idea. The question then arises as to whence the content of an idea, in terms of its objective reality, is derived. It is with regard to the origin of this content that the possibility of a direct correspondence to the extramental existence of an object of thought arises. As Gueroult argues,

> The thinking self can immediately attribute to itself thoughts as modes, but it cannot attribute their contents to itself, which, although falling within its realm, remain unexplained with respect to their origin...This inquiry into the origin is possible only by the application of the principle of causality to the contents, considered in themselves.[17]

In other words, the reality which is contained objectively in the idea allows Descartes to argue for a direct link between it and an extra-ideational reality.

He articulates this principle of causality as follows. 'Now it is manifest by the natural light that there must be at least as much <reality> in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause. For where, I ask, could the effect get its reality from, if not from the cause?' (CSM II, 28). From Descartes' principle of causality, one can see that the objective reality of an idea is an effect, and an effect must be caused by something which contains at least as much reality formally as is found in the idea objectively. This principle is so obvious to

[17] Gueroult, p. 132

Descartes that he claims it to be a primary notion. In fact, it is so fundamental that it is '...the sole basis for all the beliefs we have ever had about the existence of things located outside our mind.' (CSMII, 97). This means that the cause of the objective reality in the idea is a reality which exists formally in that cause.

However, the idea itself cannot contain formal reality, but can contain only objective reality. (CSM II, 28). 'As I recently described, the idea A which represents some object X which is F is said to contain F objectively in the idea A. Now it can be said that F is contained formally in the object X. This same idea, A, will have formal reality, but this formal reality will reside merely in the substance of thought. 'The nature of an idea is such that it requires no formal reality except what it derives from my thought, of which it is a mode [i.e. a manner or way of thinking.]' (CSM II, 28). This formal reality is not the cause of the objective reality contained in the idea. As Gueroult noted, the contents of the thought cannot be attributed to the thinking self, only the mode of thought itself can be accounted for by the self. The formal reality of an object of thought is distinct from the formal reality of the self as a thinking substance.

Descartes defines the formal reality of objects as follows:

> Whatever exists in the objects of our ideas in a way which exactly corresponds to our perception of it is said to exist formally in those objects. (CSM II, 114)

In terms of the nature of an idea, or an idea as a mode of thinking, the formal reality of the idea is derived from thought itself. By contrast, the content of an idea, that is, what differentiates one idea from another (the formal reality existing in the object of thought) is responsible for the objective reality existing in the idea. As noted earlier, it is Descartes' position that reality is the kind of thing that admits of degrees. An important tenet of his theory of causality is that the

degree of reality contained objectively in the idea cannot exceed the degree of reality contained formally in the cause of the idea.

> In order for a given idea to contain such and such objective reality, it must surely derive it from some cause which contains at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea. For if we suppose that an idea contains something which was not in its cause, it must have got this from nothing; yet the mode of being by which a thing exists objectively <or representatively> in the intellect by way of an idea, imperfect though it may be, is certainly not nothing, and so it cannot come from nothing. (CSM II, 28–29)

If objective reality is present in an idea, then the cause of this idea, whether it exists in the mind or extramentally, will contain at least the same degree of reality formally that the idea itself contains objectively.[18]

Descartes' claim that 'something found in the effect that is not in the cause must have come from nothing' raises an important issue. Ultimately, he must settle the issue of resemblance between an idea and its object, but he is well aware that he cannot argue for this resemblance on the basis of an agreement in degrees of reality. I hold it to be Descartes' position that he is concerned here about accountability of the content of an idea in regard to its origin. His common notion that 'nothing comes from nothing' is equivalent to the common notion that '...there is nothing in the effect which was not previously present in the cause, either in a similar or in a higher form'. (CSM II, 97) In his reply to Mersenne, Descartes explains this in the following way:

> For if we admit that there is something in the effect that was not previously present in the cause, we shall also have to admit that

[18] The cause is said to contain reality either formally or eminently. 'Something is said to exist eminently in an object when, although it does not exactly correspond to our perception of it, its greatness is such that it can fill the role of that which does so correspond.'(CSM II, 114; CSM II, 28) The condition of eminence is that it is greater than but never less than that of formal existence.

> this something was produced by nothing. And the reason why nothing cannot be the cause of a thing is simply that such a cause would not contain the same features as are found in the effect. (CSM II, 97)

If an idea has, for example, 3x degrees of objective reality in it, then the cause of that idea must have at least 3x degrees or more formal reality in it. Otherwise, how would one account for that particular degree of objective reality? This is not the same as saying that the formal reality of the object exactly resembles the objective reality in the idea, thereby conferring objective validity on the idea. Rather, it is another way of saying that whatever exists as the cause formally of the reality in the idea objectively must contain as much or more reality than the idea. This is to address the question of origin rather than resemblance. This is of importance to Descartes for the following reason. If it is possible to find even one idea that contains such a degree of objective reality that it is impossible that such an idea could have originated in him, because he could not possess an equal or greater degree of formal reality, then he will know that something exists outside him that is the cause of such an idea. (CSM II, 29)

This investigation into the cause of the objective content of an idea must, of necessity, be performed prior to any judgement of resemblance between the idea and its object, or to any judgement about the extramental existence of an object. To do otherwise is to invite the charge of circularity.[19]

[19] While it is clear that Descartes cannot assume the existence of an extramental object without incurring the charge of circularity, he is particularly constrained in this way because of his argument for the existence of God in Meditation III. As Beck points out, 'If one is not to get into a circular argument, it must not be the existence of God which solves the problem of the objective value of our ideas, but contrariwise the latter problem must be the key to the former, and should be treated on its own.'(p. 162, L. Beck)

This accusation can only be avoided by arguing from the certainty of the contents of an idea to the certainty of an extramental existent. Furthermore, unless an analysis of the content of an idea is carried out, one will remain ignorant as to the source of error in the action of judgement. And this is what Gueroult argues Descartes' position to be. 'It is evident,in this way, that one cannot discover a solid terrain except in the parts of judgements that are indifferent to truth and falsity in actuality, meaning in their contents with respect to which judgement will be practised.'[20]

Yet, it is precisely in examination of these contents that the idea which is termed materially false emerges.

4. Materially False Ideas

As we saw in the previous section, Descartes is interested in those ideas which represent things to him. Of those ideas, he is interested in any one which may contain the requisite degree of objective reality that will allow him to infer a cause existing outside himself. Ideas which do represent something to him include ideas of himself, '...God, corporeal and inanimate things, angels, animals and other men like himself.' (CSM II, 29) Ideas of other men, animals, and angels could all have been composed from the ideas he has of himself, corporeal things and of God, regardless of whether other men, angels or animals exist. (CSM II, 29) The idea which gives him a representation of himself can provide no solution

[20] Gueroult, p. 110

to his problem, insofar as he is interested in a cause that could exist outside himself. Consequently, he looks to the ideas that represent corporeal things and God.

His examination of ideas of corporeal things reveals that there is '...nothing in them so great <or excellent> as to make it seem impossible that it originated in myself.' (CSMII, 29) Very few of the things Descartes perceives in the ideas of corporeal objects are clear and distinct. Only the properties of extension, shape, motion, substance, duration and number are perceived clearly and distinctly. (CSM II, 30)

> But as for all the rest, including light and colours, sounds, smells, tastes, heat and cold and the other tactile qualities, I think of these only in a very confused and obscure way, to the extent that I do not even know whether they are true or false, that is whether the ideas I have of them are ideas of real things or of non-things 'chimerical things which cannot exist'[as the French version has it]. For although, as I have noted before, falsity in the strict sense, or formal falsity, can occur only in judgements, there is another kind of falsity, material falsity, which occurs in ideas, when they represent non-things as things. (CSM II, 30)

It is agreed that when Descartes speaks of 'real' things, he intends 'real' to mean possibly existing, not actually existing.(CSMII, 83) As indicated earlier, knowledge of the existence of a thing is inferred from the knowledge of a thing's attributes. Descartes explains this in the following way.

> In virtue of the common notion that nothingness possesses no attributes, that is to say, no properties or qualities...if we perceive the presence of some attribute, we can infer that there must also be present an existing thing or substance to which it may be attributed.(CSM I,210, Pr. 52).

From the foregoing, I can say that the ideas referred to above as materially false are ideas of properties or qualities which could be attributed to a thing or

substance. However, these ideas are obscure and confused. Only clear and distinct ideas of properties and qualities can provide the grounds to infer the existence of a thing to which these may be attributed. For Descartes, materially false ideas are confused and obscure to such an extent that he is unable to tell whether it is true or false that these ideas represent something which could possibly exist.

When an idea represents a non-thing (or a thing which cannot exist extramentally) as if a thing which can exist extramentally, then this idea is materially false. It is not Descartes' position that any idea which represents something which cannot exist extramentally is a materially false idea. A non-thing is not nothing, rather, it is a thing which has no actual existence. This is not the same as saying that it has no possible existence. An idea of a chimera is an idea of a non-thing in so far as it does not have actual existence. An idea of a chimera is an idea whose object has possible existence. An idea of a chimera has objective reality. An idea of a chimera is not a materially false idea.

As illustrations of materially false ideas, Descartes gives the following:

> For example, the ideas which I have of heat and cold contain so little clarity and distinctness that they do not enable me to tell whether cold is merely the absence of heat or vice versa, or whether both of them are real qualities, or neither is. And since there can be no ideas which are not as it were of things 'And since ideas, being like images, must in each case appear to us to represent something' [as the French version has it], if it is true that cold is nothing but the absence of heat, the idea which represents it to me as something real and positive deserves to be called false; and the same goes for other ideas of this kind. (CSM II, 30)

I am convinced that a great deal of the confusion surrounding the concept of a materially false idea can be attributed to incorrect readings of this passage. In particular, confusion arises from the employment of 'representation' in this passage. When Descartes says that an idea is 'as it were of a thing' or 'as if of a thing', he is not saying that it truly is 'of a thing'. Because the content of the idea must be examined prior to judgement, it can only 'appear to us' to truly represent something. The sense of representation involved at the pre-judgemental stage is one of the relation between an idea and the internal object of thought. When Descartes claims in the above passage 'if it is true that cold is nothing but the absence of heat', the representative relation he refers to here is that between the idea and the extramental object of thought.

What is not yet known is whether or not the idea truly represents the thing. If there is true representation, then there is objective validity, namely a correspondence between the objective reality contained in the idea and the formal reality contained in the object of that idea. Prior to a judgement about this relation, all that can be said of the idea is that it appears to represent a thing. This is to say that it could truly represent a thing. What is really at issue at the stage of the examination of the content of an idea is whether or not the idea actually represents a thing.

In the case of the idea of heat, this idea lacks clarity and distinctness to the extent that I am unable to know whether or not my idea of heat is an idea of a real quality. If heat is a real quality, then that reality will be actually present in the content of the idea. Actual presence of objective reality in an idea will allow one to conclude to the possibility of existence of the object of that idea. But,

objective reality must be clearly and distinctly perceived. As Descartes affirms, 'In the concept of everything that is clearly and distinctly conceived, possible existence is contained.'(CSM II, 83)

As I indicated earlier, 'reality' does not entail 'existing' but it does entail 'possibly existing'. In other words, ideas that represent what has reality are ideas that could represent things. To have reality objectively is not to exist extramentally. Ideas of non-things, like a chimera, have reality objectively but a chimera does not exist extramentally. The object of a fictitious idea such as a chimera may fail to exist extramentally for various reasons. However, all ideas of non-things will share the common imperfection that no formal reality exists which corresponds to the objective reality contained in the idea.

All ideas are 'as if' or 'like' the image of a thing, or 'appear to us to represent something'. The nature of an idea is to appear to be of something. Should an idea fail to appear to us in that way, then it cannot be an idea. When an idea represents something to me as if it were real, then reality will be contained in the content of the idea. An idea that is materially false represents this reality fallaciously, i.e. it represents something to me as real, as possibly existing, when, in fact, the thing that is represented does not have this reality. Heat, for example, which may or may not be a real quality, is represented to me as if it is a real quality. To this extent, the idea of heat is materially false. How can heat be represented to me as if it is real?

As I said, Descartes' position is that an idea is materially false when it represents what is not a real thing as though it were a real thing. In other words, the idea claims to be an idea of something that, in truth, does not have the reality which the idea purports the object to have. It cannot be the case that Descartes claims an idea is materially false on the grounds that it represents a non-thing, because it would be impossible to represent a non-thing. Nor can his claim be that an idea is materially false because it represents what does not exist extramentally as something that could exist extramentally. An idea of a chimera is an idea of something that does not exist extramentally, but the idea of a chimera is not materially false. At this point, it seems that an idea that is materially false shares some of the features of an idea that is fictitious.

For not only do materially false ideas represent non-things as if things, they also originate in the subject's mind. Descartes describes their source as follows:

> ...such ideas obviously do not require me to posit a source distinct from myself. For on the one hand, if they are false, that is, represent non-things, I know by the natural light that they arise from nothing--that is, they are in me only because of a deficiency and lack of perfection in my nature. If on the other hand they are true, then since the reality which they represent is so extremely slight that I cannot even distinguish it from a non-thing, I do not see why they cannot originate from myself. (CSM II, 30)

From this passage, we can infer the following. Firstly, an idea that represents something which cannot exist originates in myself. This seems to be the case both for an idea of a chimera, for example, and for an idea which is materially false, that is an idea that represents something which cannot exist as something which can exist. An idea of a chimera is not materially false. Yet, it does represent something that cannot exist as something that can exist.

Secondly, if the idea is true, that is, materially true, then it will represent a discernible degree of reality. But, since this idea represents a degree of reality that is so slight, and to the same extent is so little clear and distinct, that it is not possible to distinguish it from non-reality, then this idea still does not require an origin other than myself.

What, then, does a materially false idea claim to represent since all ideas must appear to us to represent something? I will argue in Chapter II that what a materially false idea appears to represent is objective reality. But, as Descartes says, all ideas must appear to us to represent something real or possible. Only certain ideas actually represent something real or possible, and this includes fictitious ideas. It is difficult to see how an idea can be false on this ground alone, because many ideas can appear to represent reality. And if it is false on the grounds that what it appears to represent does not have the reality it seems to have, then this would be an instance of formal, and not material, falsity. This is precisely Arnauld's objection to Descartes. (CSMII, 163)

Descartes tells us that material falsity has no reference to the truth or falsity of the object. How do we know if an idea truly represents as opposed to appearing to represent? Only those ideas which actually possess objective reality can be said to truly represent. But what does it mean then for an idea to falsely represent? This question indicates the crux of the difficulty in Descartes' account of materially false ideas. It is the subject of Chapter II of this thesis to respond to this question.

## 5. Two Senses of Representation

I will argue in Chapter II that Descartes employs two senses of representation although he is never explicit about such a duality. I designate formal representation as the sense of representation Descartes uses when he speaks of formal falsity, i.e. judging that the idea resembles or conforms to an object located outside him. Error occurs when the will assents to this conformity or resemblance when the idea itself is not clearly and distinctly perceived. However, if the idea does truly resemble or conform to a thing located outside the mind, then the idea will have objective validity.

I designate intramental representation as the sense of representation Descartes intends to be used when he speaks of material falsity, i.e. when an idea represents a non-thing as if a thing. This sense of representation refers to an intramental relation between the idea and the internal object of thought. In other words, this sense of representation has to do with the idea only and what is represented to the knowing subject in terms of the content of the idea. What is crucial in this relation is how the content of the idea is represented, or more accurately, presented to the subject. I describe this relation as that between the representative character and the representative content of the idea, and I shall explicate this relation in Chapters II and III.

The formal sense of representation, which involves the application of Descartes' principle of causality, requires the content of the idea to be discernible, i.e. clear and distinct. If the content is discernible, then the question of origin can be settled. Once the question of origin is settled, then the question of resemblance can be addressed.

Once Descartes has established that the objective reality of an idea is present and discernible, then he is able to look for a formal cause, and apply the principle of causality. C. Normore[21] argues for an equation between the objective reality of an idea and the possible existence of the object of an idea. I will deal with his argument for this equation in Chapter II, but I raise the issue now as it provides a further indication of how this formal representative relation functions.

Descartes must depend on the presence of objective reality in his idea as the basis to infer possible existence of the object of his idea. Consequently, he must establish the actuality of objective reality in the content of his idea. If objective reality is actually present, it will be clearly and distinctly perceived.

I will argue in Chapter II that in a materially false idea, objective reality is not actually present in the content of the idea although it is thought to be present. The falsity in the idea is the result of a fallacious representation which is of the intramental kind. I will argue in Chapter III that the content of the idea is obscure, and it is this obscurity that allows the fallacious representation to occur.

[21] C. Normore, "Meaning and Objective Being", Essays on Descartes Meditations, (Ed. A. Rorty, University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1986), p. 238. (Hereafter referred to as Normore)

6. Historical Survey

The brief outline of selected critics' comments given in this section will focus on the areas of confusion that I consider of importance for my argument. These comments are indicative of the difficulty inherent in Descartes' exposition of the nature of materially false ideas.

For instance, Beck writes that Descartes' '...meaning is difficult to assess [with regard to "material" truth or falsity] but given his reply to Arnauld, ideas are materially true or false in so far as they give the "materials" for true or false judgment.'[22] As I have indicated, what is at issue is the way in which a false idea can provide material for judgement. It cannot simply be that the idea is false because it is not clear and distinct and thus can provide material for error, like any other confused and obscure idea. For not all ideas that are obscure and confused are materially false.

Descartes argues that material falsity is a particular kind of falsity that exists in the idea itself. If this idea is materially false, then it can provide material for a false judgement. I have already argued that the kind of falsity Descartes ascribes to ideas cannot be the same kind of falsity that occurs in judgements about ideas. Beck, however, goes on to interpret Descartes' meaning of material truth and falsity in such a mistaken way.

[22] Beck, p. 176

> From Descartes' position, the ideas, which are all that we directly know, are modificationes cogitationes, in so far as they are states of consciousness. And in order to convert this acceptance of a modification of our consciousness into knowledge, we must in some way operate upon the content presented to us in the idea. This operation, or act, which confers objectivity upon the content of the idea, is ascribed to the will, and is described by him as the act of assent or dissent, that is, affirmation or negation of an idea's content received by the understanding. [23]

If Beck were correct in what he states Descartes' position to be, this would mean that perceiving the content of an idea is an action of the will. I shall argue that the act or operation which Beck describes cannot be ascribed to the will. The affirmation or negation of the content is an affirmation or negation of a clear and distinct perception of the content. This clear and distinct perception of the content is an operation of the understanding, specifically, that of the intellect. This operation of the intellect must occur, by Descartes' definition of a materially false idea, without reference to the extramental object. (CSMII, 163) The act to which Beck refers is one of confirming or denying the objective value of the idea, which is the confirmation or negation of the resemblance of the idea to its object. But the role that the idea which is materially false plays is prior to any judgement about resemblance.

Following the statement I have quoted, Beck concludes that '...if then the content of our ideas is clear and distinct, these ideas are materially true, for they furnish the materials of a true judgment. Clear and distinct perception is the mark of material truth and attentive insight into material truth is the condition and standard of formal truth.' [24] If what Beck claims here is right, then

[23] Beck, p. 177

[24] Beck, p. 177

material truth of ideas is the same thing as clarity and distinctness of ideas and material falsity is the same thing as obscurity and confusion of ideas. While Descartes does say that materially false ideas are obscure and confused, it is difficult to understand why he would want to claim that all obscure and confused ideas are materially false. If we accept Beck's interpretation of Descartes, then this would be the consequence. If this were the case, then one wonders why Descartes would even bring up the issue of materially false ideas. Beck has failed to see the relevance of the distinction between formal and material falsity. As I have argued, formal falsity is a function of both the will and the understanding; material falsity, in contrast, is a function of the understanding alone.

In contrast to Beck, F. Broadie[25], presents a different perspective on the nature of materially false ideas. He claims that ideas of sense are problematic for Descartes and this is evident with regard to materially false ideas. Broadie argues that for an idea to be materially false is for that idea

> ... to represent as something what is really nothing, or really something else; or even to represent an alleged something which cannot exist because it is endowed with contradictory properties...But sensory ideas may be obscure and confused, insofar as one is not sure whether to describe their objects as, say, very hot or very cold. Here, we don't know what to think. We seem unable, not merely to give the right name, but to decide what we feel.[26]

[25] F. Broadie, An Approach to Descartes' Meditations, (Athlone Press, U. of London, 1970, hereafter referred to as Broadie.)

[26] Ibid., p. 76

A closer examination of Broadie's description of materially false ideas reveals that he has confused several facets of Descartes' thought. Firstly, Descartes is not simply telling us that materially false ideas are confused and obscure; he tells us that these ideas are confused and obscure in a particular kind of way. Not all confused and obscure ideas are materially false; nor are all ideas of sense confused and obscure. In fact, ideas of sense, '...may be clearly perceived provided we take great care in our judgements concerning them to include no more than what is strictly contained in our perception -- no more than that of which we have inner awareness.' (CSM I, 216, Pr. 66) Secondly, it would present immeasurable difficulties for Descartes if what he said of ideas and representation was that it is possible for an idea to have one thing as its object and represent yet another thing.[27] Furthermore, for an idea to 'represent an alleged thing which cannot exist because it is endowed with contradictory properties' would seem to rule out an entire class of fictitious ideas. For example, an idea of a chimera is an idea of something that does not have extramental existence; but it is not a materially false idea. An idea of a chimera is an idea that represents something as possibly existing. However, when the idea is analyzed into distinct components it is seen to represent an object which would possess contradictory properties that cannot exist together. If this is the kind of idea of which Broadie is speaking, then it cannot be the case that this is an example of a materially false idea.

[27] see M. Bolton, "Confused and Obscure Ideas of Sense", Essays on Descartes' Meditations, U. of C. Press, Los Angeles, Calif., 1986, pp.393-94. Bolton interprets Descartes reply to Arnauld (HRII, 106-107) as confirmation that an idea cannot falsely exhibit its object or that a false idea cannot exhibit one thing and have another as object.

A third commentator, Anthony Kenny, asserts that Descartes is not simply inconsistent in the way in which he speaks of ideas,[28] but is, by his own admission, ambiguous with regard to ideas. To support his claim, Kenny cites a passage in the Preface to the Meditations wherein Descartes states, 'In this term idea there is an equivocation: it may either be taken materially, as an act of my understanding...or objectively, as what is represented by this act.' (CSM II, 7) [29] Kenny interprets this passage to mean that 'Sometimes...an idea is an operation or act of the mind; at other times it is not so much an act of the mind as the object or content of such an act.' [30]

Kenny's interpretation entails that an idea is either an act of the mind, or an object of an act of the mind, but not both. I will show, in Chapter II, that Descartes does not intend what Kenny says he does. I will argue that what Descartes does mean by the passage in the Preface is that an idea is both a mental operation, or act of the mind, and an object of this mental operation. In fact, this mental operation 'contains' or 'represents' an object of this mental operation. I will argue further that what Descartes means by representation with regard to materially false ideas is the sense of representation I refer to as intramental, and not the sense of representation I refer to as formal.

[28] Kenny, p. 229

[29] Kenny, p. 229

[30] Ibid., p. 229

Furthermore, Kenny misinterprets the reference to idea as 'objective' in the passage from the Preface to mean objective reality, rather than objective existence.[31] I will argue in Chapter II, that it is objective existence or objective being that Descartes refers to in the Preface; and that it is not his intention to refer to objective reality. Objective existence (or being) and objective reality are not the same thing. For an idea to be an idea at all, it must be an idea of something, which is to say that the idea has an object of thought. It is this object of thought that has objective existence in the mind. In contrast to objective existence, objective reality is a property that must be discerned as present in the content of the idea. It will be seen in Chapter II that not all ideas actually have objective reality.

In his discussion of the truth and falsity of ideas, Kenny claims that for Descartes ideas may be 'defective' in two ways; the first being that an idea is not real, for example, the idea of immobility, darkness or nothingness; and, secondly, that an idea can be materially false, which is to 'represent what is not a thing as if it were a thing.' Kenny adds, 'Suppose, for instance, that cold is merely the absence of heat, and I take it for a reality in its own right. In that case I have a "materially false" idea of cold.'[32] This means that if the object of the idea is in truth a non-reality, or an absence of something, and I take it as an idea of a reality, then I have an instance of a 'materially false' idea. If this is the correct interpretation of Descartes' argument, then we are faced with two perplexing problems.

[31] Kenny, p. 240

[32] Kenny, p. 243

It is these problems that will be the subject of discussion in Chapter II. One is that the idea which I have wrongly assumed to represent reality is in fact an idea that represents no reality. This problem will be addressed at the beginning of Chapter II when I consider Dauler Wilson's analysis of Descartes' position. The question she raises is how can an idea represent something and yet have no reality. The second problems arises if Descartes is understood to claim that a materially false idea is one which represents a reality that, in fact, it does not have. If this is what he means, then what does a materially false idea represent? This is the question which Arnauld raises in the Objections to the Meditations. (CSM II, 87) Both Arnauld's objection and Descartes' reply will be discussed in Chapter II.

## CHAPTER II

### I. Representational Character and Objective Reality

It was a conclusion of Chapter I that an idea has representative character when it purports to be 'of a thing'. If these ideas are taken simply as 'modes of thought', then there are no differences among them which need to be accounted for. However, if one takes the ideas in terms of their contents, namely what the ideas represent, then one must account for the differences among ideas. Descartes explains these differences in terms of the ontological hierarchy of objects that are represented. And it is the degree of objective reality present in ideas that reflects the ontological (or formal) reality of the objects represented by these ideas. An idea of a finite substance will contain more objective reality than an idea of a mode or an accident. Accordingly, a substance will contain more formal reality than a mode or an accident. This would seem to mean that, for Descartes, any idea which purports to be 'of a thing' will have some degree of objective reality which will vary according to the ontological status of the object represented by the idea. My intention in this chapter is to demonstrate Descartes' position to be that some degree of objective reality will be actually present in the content of an idea only when the idea itself is actually 'of a thing'.

As we saw in Chapter I, it is the representative character of all ideas (i.e. that they purport to be 'of a thing') that allows some ideas to be materially false. Those ideas which are materially false are those which represent a non-thing as if it is a thing.

In other words, for an idea to be materially false it must be an idea which has representative character.

Wilson's reading of this fact allows her to conclude that the material falsity of an idea derives from its representational character.[33] In her analysis, Wilson argues that Descartes' description of a materially false idea is inconsistent.[34] Her claim is based on the interpretation that a materially false idea both (i) represents a non-thing as if a thing and (ii) proceeds from nothing (i.e. the idea has no real cause and is in the mind only because of a deficiency in one's nature). (CSM II, 30) From this account of Descartes', Wilson concludes that ideas of sense, when materially false, '...lack objective reality, despite having representative character'.[35] This consequence of Descartes' position, Wilson argues, is incoherent on the grounds that an idea, being representative by nature, must purport to be of a thing. It is Wilson's interpretation that, for an idea to be 'of a thing', the idea must contain objective reality. Essential to Wilson's argument is her interpretation that 'the representative character [of the idea] essential to material falsity necessarily involves a positive content [in the idea]'.[36] Her position agrees with that of Arnauld, when he indicates the contradiction inherent in this view.

[33] Wilson, pp. 105-06

[34] Ibid., p. 111

[35] Ibid., p. 111

[36] Ibid., p. 115

Arnauld questions how an idea (which is 'of a thing' and thereby must have a positive content) can represent something which is not real or positive, namely, a non-thing. As Wilson asserts,

> Arnauld is insisting that we can't say a given idea both represents x 'as something positive' or 'as if a thing', and completely lacks objective reality. [The] representative character essential to material falsity necessarily involves a positive content, and must by Descartes's "principles" have a positive cause. In other words, Descartes contradicts himself in saying that materially false ideas come from nothing, from the "objective" point of view. [37]

The 'principles' to which Wilson (and Arnauld) refer are the primary notions that 'nothing can come from nothing' and 'that there must be at least as much reality in the cause as in the the effect'. Wilson argues that rather than abandon the position that materially false ideas proceed from nothing, Descartes instead abandons the view 'that the representative character of ideas of sense (which is surely something 'positive') is a source of our mistaken beliefs about the real qualities of objects'.[38] She claims that in his reply to Arnauld, Descartes explains that an idea is materially false because it is obscure and confused-- this as distinct from his previous claim that an idea is materially false because it represents a non-thing as if a thing.

As a result of this alleged incoherence, Wilson claims that Descartes altered his position on two accounts: '(i) that ideas of sense are not materially false because they proceed from nothing [because the idea represents a non-thing as if a thing]; rather they are materially false because they are obscure and confused;

[37] Wilson, p. 115

[38] Ibid., p. 115

and (ii) that not all ideas, and particularly ideas of sense, have representative character.[39]

I do not agree with Wilson that Descartes' description of materially false ideas reveals an incoherence. I do agree with Wilson that a materially false idea lacks objective reality despite having representative character. However, this 'lack' (or absence) of objective reality is an actual lack, and not an apparent lack. I will argue that a materially false idea appears (or is thought) to have objective reality and it is precisely because we take the idea to have objective reality that it is a materially false idea. The distinction between the actual and the apparent presence of objective reality in the content of a materially false idea is a distinction which Wilson fails to make.

As a result of my view of Descartes' position on the nature of a materially false idea, I will argue against Wilson's claim that Descartes altered his position from that given in the Meditations. I will show in the latter part of this chapter, and again in Chapter III, that Descartes' view given in the Meditations is consistent with his view presented in the Replies and in the Principles. I hold it to be consistently Descartes' position that the content of an idea that is materially false proceeds from nothing, and the material falsity occurs because the content of the idea is obscure and confused.

Wilson's claim that Descartes alters his position on the issue of materially

[39] Wilson, pp. 114–16

false ideas leads her to a further conclusion, namely, that he also altered his position about the representational character of ideas. While his position outlined in the Meditations allowed one to conclude that all ideas have representational character, Wilson claims that in the Principles Descartes implies that not all ideas, and particularly certain ideas of sense, have representative character.[40] I agree with Wilson that certain ideas of sense lack representative character, in so far as they are not 'of a thing' strictly speaking. This conclusion will be explicated in Chapter III. However, I maintain that Descartes consistently holds this view in the Meditations and in the Principles, albeit not explicitly. I will argue that an idea of sense has intramental representative character. However, such an idea is not capable of representing anything located outside thought. In other words, it is not the kind of idea for which a distinction between objective and formal reality does arise.

Like other commentators, Wilson describes the representational character of ideas as that feature by which ideas are 'like the images of things'.[41] Apart from the notion of representation meaning that ideas have objects (such as ideas of God, of heat, etc.) according to which they are classified, Wilson claims that Descartes also means 'that ideas are received by the mind as if exhibiting to it various things--or as if making things cognitively accessible.'[42] In this passage, I understand 'cognitive accessibility' to mean that the objects of ideas are

[40] Wilson, pp. 116-17

[41] Wilson, pp. 102-3

[42] Ibid., p. 102

received by the mind in a way that qualifies them as potential items of knowledge. This is to say that an idea, because of its representational character, allows the object to be known.[43] Wilson also affirms a feature of an idea which I have already discussed, namely that an idea does not need to be an image in any other sense than that of being a kind of form, 'that form by the immediate awareness of which I am conscious of that said thought.'[44] This type of consciousness would then be sufficient for the kind of 'cognitive accessibility' outlined above.

However, the question must then be raised as to how one can claim 'cognitive accessibility' to the extramental without relating the idea to the extramental? From the arguments presented in Chapter I, one can see that these questions also relate to the issue of the objective validity of ideas. It is my argument that the problems created by these questions can only be resolved by a clear understanding of the nature of the representational character of Cartesian ideas. It is to a closer examination of this feature of an idea that I will now turn. I will return later in this chapter to a closer examination of Wilson's criticisms of Descartes.

[43] It is my view that for Descartes only certain objects are capable of being known, namely those objects which are capable of being represented. Any object capable of being represented is capable of being known as an object. In other words, an object is known to exist as an object because its properties are capable of being represented. Kenny (see Kenny, p. 245) raises a similar question when he asks 'what is the criterion for an object to be the object of an idea'?

[44] Wilson uses the HR II, 52 passage. CSM translates this as 'the form of any given thought, immediate perception of which makes me aware of the thought'. (CSM II, 113)

2. The Nature of Representation in a Materially False Idea

At the end of my first chapter, I described Kenny's claim that Descartes' use of the term 'idea' was ambiguous.[45] In the Preface to the Meditations, Descartes responds to the objection that 'From the fact that I have within me an idea of a thing more perfect than myself, it does not follow that the idea itself is more perfect than me, still less that what is represented by the idea exists.' (CSM II, 7) His response is to explain that there exists a certain ambiguity in the word 'idea'.

> 'Idea' can be taken materially, as an operation of the intellect, in which case it cannot be said to be more perfect than me. Alternatively, it can be taken objectively, as the thing represented by that operation; and this thing, even if it is not regarded as existing outside the intellect, can still, in virtue of its essence, be more perfect than myself. (CSM II, 7).

As we will recall, Kenny took it to be Descartes' view that the term 'idea' can be interpreted to indicate the use of either of the senses described above depending on his intention. In contrast to Kenny, V. Chappell[46] presents a reading of this passage that takes an idea to have, concurrently, both material and objective aspects. In other words, it is Chappell's position that Descartes intends the term 'idea' to be understood as a composite of both aspects, each of which is necessarily joined to the other by a representative relation. These aspects are distinct in so far as they can be considered separately, but this distinction is only

[45] Kenny also signals the fact that Descartes' use of the term to refer to the contents of the mind was a departure from the standard Scholastic use of the term. In the Schools, 'idea' referred to archetypes in the divine intellect. (see Kenny, p. 227 )

[46] V. Chappell, "The Theory of Ideas", Essays on Descartes' Meditations, (Ed. A. O. Rorty, Univeristy of California Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1986) pp. 177–198. (Hereafter referred to as Chappell).

conceptual, and not real.[47] Not only are these two aspects of an idea not distinct realities, the material and objective sense of the idea are related to each other in such a way that for an idea to be an idea at all it must have both aspects which are necessarily related by representation. Chappell describes Descartes' intended meaning of the term 'idea' as follows:

> An idea in the material sense of the word is a mental act or event, something that occurs in the mind. An idea in the objective sense, by contrast, is something upon which the mind is directed, a mental object. Ideas(m) and ideas(o), furthermore, are related, in that the latter are things represented by the former.[48]

Thus, (to restate what is to me most important here) an idea, in the material sense, is an operation of the intellect which represents the objective aspect of the idea. In addition, the objective aspect, or internal object of thought, does not have to exist outside the intellect in order for this representation to occur. The distinction between the intramental and extramental representative relation (which I introduced in Chaper I) is now explicable in terms of Chappell's terminology. It is my position that the representative relation between an idea(m) and an idea(o) is an intramental relation. The formal (or extramental) relation of representation is between the idea(o) and the extramental object (which may or may not exist).

[47] Chappell claims that of the three Cartesian distinctions, namely 'real' 'modal' and 'conceptual', only the latter can be applied to these aspects of an idea. (see Chappell, p. 193) From Descartes' description of the conceptual distinction, this would mean something like 'the distinction between two attributes of a single substance'; the substance being 'unintelligible' without these attributes. (see CSM I, p. 214–15, Pr. 62)

[48] Chappell, p. 178. The notation idea(m) and idea(o) will be used throughout to refer to idea(in its material aspect) and idea (in its objective aspect) respectively.

Chappell argues that ideas in the material sense (ideas (m)) are perceptions.[49] I have already explained that for Descartes the intellect is one of the two faculties of the mind, the other being volition. We also know that all the specific modes of thought like sense-perception, imagination and pure understanding, are modes of perception which is one of the two general modes of thinking, i.e. perception and volition.(CSMI, 204, Pr. 32) Given this, Chappell argues that '...an individual thought may be said to be an operation or act, as well as a mode, of the mind...and, all of the mind's operations--all of its modes--are thoughts.'[50] From the foregoing, he concludes that,

> Perceiving is the peculiar activity of the intellect, the specific mode of thinking that this department or portion of the mind engages in. The individual operations or acts of the intellect, therefore, are not merely thoughts but, more specifically, perceptions. Recalling now that Descartes defines an idea in the material sense as an "operation of the intellect", we can conclude : ideas(m) are perceptions.[51]

From this conclusion, Chappell proposes that if ideas(m) are perceptions, then other characteristics of perception can be attributed to them. Apart from the characteristic of passion (whereby the mind receives or accepts its thoughts), ideas(m) also have the characteristic of being '...modifications of Cartesian substances',[52] namely that of the substance of the mind. As Chappell

[49] Chappell, p. 182

[50] Ibid., p. 181

[51] Ibid., p. 182

[52] Ibid., p. 183

explains, the idea(m) of the sun, for example, '...is an "act" or "mode" of the substance my mind is, and it "inheres in" or "belongs to" this substance.'[53] However, Chappell asserts, 'the acts or operations of the intellect--including all ideas(m)--also have actual or formal being'.[54] Chappell characterized an idea(m) as a mode of the substance of the mind, therefore an idea(m) is an 'act' or 'mode' of the substance of mind and thereby belongs to that substance. In this way, an idea(m) has formal or actual reality.

The foregoing explanation of an idea(m) is an account of its nature, namely that it '...is only a mode existing in the human mind'.(Letter to Regius, June 1642; K, 134) As such, ideas(m) do not differ one from the other. 'In so far as the ideas are <considered> simply <as> modes of thought, there is no recognizable inequality among them'. (CSM II,27) In addition to its nature, Chappell argues that an idea(m) also has a function. The function of an idea(m) is that it represents things to the mind, and 'it is this representative function that distinguishes ideas(m) from thoughts generally.'[55] Chappell supports this claim with Descartes' assertion that 'in so far as different ideas <are considered as images which> represent different things, it is clear that they differ widely.'(CSM II, 27-28)

[53] Chappell, p. 183. Given these characterizations of an idea(m), Chappell infers an additional feature of an idea(m). According to Descartes, '...substances generally have more "reality" or "perfection" than modes or accidents do (HRII, 56)'. Chappell claims this means that my idea of God, for example, in its aspect as an idea(m) is a "mode or accident", whereas I am a substance. This, claims Chappell, explains Descartes reply in the Preface when he says that if the idea is taken in the material sense, then 'it cannot be said to be more perfect than myself'. (CSM II,7)

[54] Ibid., p. 183

[55] Ibid., p. 183

Let us recall the distinction Descartes makes in Meditation III between thoughts that 'are as it were the images of things'(CSM II, 25) and those thoughts that possess some other additional form.(CSMII,26) Only of the first type of thought is the term 'idea' strictly appropriate. As we saw, this distinction paralleled another distinction made in the Principles, between the two general forms of thought, one of which is perception and the other of which is willing.(Pr.32) Those thoughts which are perceptions, then, are those thoughts which are, strictly speaking, ideas. What is common to these ideas is that they have 'representative character', that is, they appear to be 'of a thing'. The feature of an idea that is termed 'representative character' by the commentators that I have previously mentioned, is same feature of an idea which Chappell terms its 'representative function'. From Chappell's analysis, I can conclude that an idea(m) is a perception by nature and its function is to represent, hence an idea(m) is a perception with 'representative character'. In this way, it can also be seen that the idea(m) must be representative, in order to be an idea(m).[56]

From this feature of the 'representative function' of an idea(m), Chappell concludes that

> ...every idea(m) must represent something (HRI,164), different ideas(m) represent different things; and this difference among things represented--among things to which they bear the representative relation--serves to differentiate ideas(m) as well.[57]

[56] Chappell argues that not all thoughts are ideas(m), whereas ideas(m) and perceptions are coextensive. (see p. 182)

[57] Chappell, p. 183

Chappell points out that this distinction among ideas(m) differs from the distinction between an idea(m) and an idea(o) outlined in the Preface to the Meditations. Ideas(o) are the things that are represented by ideas(m), and the differences amongst ideas(o) are the differences amongst represented objects. The distinction drawn among ideas(m), Chappell argues

> is a distinction within the class of ideas(m) alone: it is a distinction, corresponding to that between their nature and their function, between these same entities considered either as they are in themselves or in relation to their representata--or between ideas(m) with respect to their intrinsic as opposed to their relational properties.[58]

The difference in these distinctions is significant for my thesis. This latter distinction is the one Descartes' makes in the above quoted passage. (CSMII, 27-28). When we consider ideas as images, in their function of representing one thing or another, each idea is different from the other. It is also the same distinction he makes in the Principles.

> When we reflect further on the ideas that we have within us, we see that some of them, in so far as they are merely modes of thinking, do not differ much one from another; but in so far as one idea represents one thing and another represents another, they differ widely. (CSM I, 198, Pr. 17)

Again, in reply to Arnauld, Descartes explains 'If...we were considering them [ideas] not as representing this or that but simply as operations of the intellect, then it could be said that we were taking them materially.' (CSMII, 163)

From Chappell's analysis one can see that an idea(m) is not an autonomous idea in and of itself. Rather, it is necessarily connected to the other aspect of the same idea, namely, an idea(o). All that can be said of an idea(m) so far is

[58] Chappell, p. 183

that it is a perception, that it has representative character and having representative character is its function, and that it is this representative character or function which distinguishes ideas(m) among themselves.

Chappell states that the precise objects of consciousness, which are a condition of the possibility of consciousness itself, (for 'to be conscious is to be conscious of something') are the ideas(o).[59] As will be shown via Chappell's analysis, the idea(o) has a particular significance for Descartes. Chappell claims, 'an idea (o) is a thing that is thought of in the sense in which such a thing is something that exists in the mind.'[60] Chappell's statement that the idea(o) is the 'thing that is thought of' reflects Descartes' position when he claims that 'objective being in the intellect...will signify the object's being in the intellect in the way in which its objects are normally there.' (CSM II, 75 and CSM II, 28) Chappell explains the nature of an idea(o) in the following manner:

> Objective being, when the res cogitata exists in the mind, is simply being; it is just the kind of being that, by its nature, such a thing partakes of. For Descartes holds that there are different modes of being or existence, different ways in which things are. Objective being is the mode in which things in the intellect characteristically exist. This sort of being is contrasted with actual or formal being, which is the mode in which things outside the intellect exist.[61]

Even though this objective being is less perfect than 'that possessed by things which exist outside the intellect...it is not therefore simply nothing,'(CSMII, 29 and CSM II, 75) asserts Descartes. In his reply to Caterus' objection that what exists in the mind is not actual and thereby cannot require a

[59] Chappell, p. 184

[60] Ibid., p. 185

[61] Ibid., p. 187

cause that is itself actual (or formal) (CSM II, 67), Descartes explains that whatever exists as an object of thought in the idea, exists objectively in the idea, and requires a cause to exist. (CSM II, 75)

From Descartes' description of objective being, Chappell concludes that '...the only things that have objective being are ideas(o)--the res cogitatae that exist in the mind. Objective being is also the only being that these things have.' [62] Objective being is contrasted with actual or formal being, which is the mode of being in which things outside the intellect exist, as well as the acts or operations of the intellect, i.e. ideas(m). Chappell also concludes that every 'thing that is thought of', then, is an object of thought and this object of thought exists in the thinker's mind. However, Chappell points out, the 'thing that is thought of' does not always refer to the internal object of thought.

> In many cases--not in all--in which someone thinks of something, there will be, in addition to the res cogitata that must exist in his mind, another res cogitata existing outside it. There will then be,in effect, two objects of thought, an external as well as an internal one. The external object will exist actually or formally, the internal only objectively. [63]

[62] Chappell, p. 187

[63] Chappell, p. 187. Chappell argues it would be misleading to interpret Descartes' view to be that there are two distinct entities which are objects of thought in cases where an actual object of thought exists external to the mind, in addition to the internal object of thought existing in the mind. He claims that it cannot be Descartes' intention that when we speak of an idea of the sun, for example, we speak of the sun as 'a species of entity, with the actual sun and the objective sun as its instances'. Chappell says that 'an alternative would be to refer to the sun that exists in my mind, and the external sun, as counterparts of one another. My idea(o) of the sun would be an objective counterpart of that familiar body that exists in the sky; it, in turn, would be the actual counterpart of my idea(o)'. Chappell adds that this interpretation of Descartes still allows some ideas(o), (like that of a chimera), to lack actual counterparts, yet still retain their objective status. (see pp. 187-88)

From Chappell's analysis I can conclude that all ideas(m) will have an internal object of thought (idea(o)), and only some ideas will have an external object of thought. To have objective existence in the mind is simply to have the internal object of thought (the idea(o)) present to the mind. Some ideas(o) will have actual counterparts, e.g. the sun, while some ideas (o) will not have actual counterparts, e.g. a chimera. But whether or not an actual object of thought exists outside the intellect, an internal object of thought (the idea(o)) will have objective existence in the mind.

This description of the objective being of an internal object of thought relates to the nature of the idea(o). However, objective existence in the mind will not explain how one idea can be different from another. It is Chappell's position that it is the differences in the contents of ideas that make ideas numerically distinct from each other. In other words, numerical distinctness between ideas cannot be accounted for in terms of different ideas(m). As we saw, differences among ideas(m) are not accounted for by reference to what they represent. What Chappell is saying here is that differences among ideas(o) cannot be accounted for by reference to their being represented. Furthermore, Chappell argues, the differences among ideas(o) cannot be accounted for by reference to an external (or actual) counterpart of the internal object of thought. It cannot be the dissimilarity amongst external objects of thought that accounts for

dissimilarity amongst internal objects of thought.[64]

To raise the question of numerical distinctness between ideas is to address the same issue as that of 'cognitive accessibility' mentioned in the first section of this chapter. It is also the same problem raised in the Chapter I, namely that one can attribute thoughts as modes to itself , but one cannot attribute the contents of thought to oneself.[65] From the distinction Chappell draws, it is clear that the idea(m) can be attributed to the self, but the idea(o) cannot be so attributed. Chappell argues that Descartes provides a way of addressing this problem by his account of property possession, and that this conveyance of property possession can be implemented in two senses.

> One is to ascribe properties to ideas(o), the same properties that actual beings have, but to do so in some qualified manner; for example, by saying that an idea(o) appears to have the property of being F or that it is as-if F. The other way is to postulate objective counterparts of the properties actual beings have; that is objective counterparts of actual properties--objective size, color, distance, and also wingedness and monsterhood and being goat-bodied.[66]

[64] It might be argued that, in a sense, the dissimilarity among external objects can account for the dissimilarity among internal objects of thought. For example, my idea of the sun differs from my idea of the moon, because the sun is different from the moon. However, this will not explain the differences in content among ideas in which no actual counterpart exist (for example, an idea of a chimera). And such an argument cannot address the instances where ideas(o) are dissimilar, yet have the same actual counterpart, for example, Descartes' two ideas of the sun.(see Chappell, p. 188-89) Furthermore, Descartes cannot assume the extramental existence (or counterpart) of an internal object of thought on the grounds that this is the very thing he is attempting to establish in terms of objective validity of ideas.

[65] See Chapter I, pp.

[66] Chappell, p. 189

As Chappell asserts, these two senses intend the same end. 'We can express the fact that something has objective F-ness by saying that it is objectively F...it is then just a short step to saying that the thing in question is as-if F.'[67] Chappell finds textual support for this claim in Descartes' definition of the objective reality of an idea, namely that 'whatever we perceive as being [as-if] in the objects of our ideas exists objectively in the ideas themselves.' (CSM II, 114)

In terms of the property of 'reality', Chappell concludes that the objective sense or counterpart of it can only be ascribed to the objective counterpart of the idea, namely, an idea(o). He claims that

> ...it is only objective beings that be said to have objective properties, the precise subject to which objective reality is ascribed must always be an idea(o). This means not only that it is not the actual sun, as opposed to the sun in my mind, that objective reality belongs to, but also that it is not an idea (m), the mental act by which I think of the sun. Both the actual sun and my mental acts have formal, not objective, reality, since both have formal or actual being rather than objective being.[68]

On Chappell's interpretation, Descartes' theory provides for ideas of 'things that have properties like the sun, a chimera and God, as well as ideas of properties by themselves like the size of the sun or the heat of the fire'.[69] Of the first kind, these are ideas(m) that represent substances; of the second kind, these are ideas(m) that represent modes or accidents of substances.[70] Chappell concludes that,

[67] Chappell, p. 189

[68] Ibid., p. 189

[69] Ibid., p. 189

[70] Ibid., p. 189

> given Descartes' position that what is represented by an idea(m) is an idea(o), and that the idea(o) is just the thing it is said to be of, in, so to speak, its objective version, we can say that objective particular properties are among the ideas(o) he recognizes, as well as objective particular substances.[71]

Even though Chappell does not address the issue of material falsity, he observes a distinction of great importance for my argument when he writes that,

> objective reality must be distinguished from objective being in Descartes' philosophy. No less is reality itself (formal reality) to be distinguished from (formal or actual being). Being belongs to a thing or it doesn't; either something is or isn't. But reality admits of degrees; everything that is has some of it, and some things have more than others. (HRII, 56). The same is true of objective reality and being.[72]

It will be the subject of the next section of this thesis to explicate the implications of Chappell's account of ideas(m) and ideas(o) for my theory of materially false ideas. Before proceeding to this expostion, I must point out two further conclusions Chappell reaches which are instrumental in the development of my argument. Firstly,

> The thinker's (or the mind's) role in representation itself is just as essential as that of the representing state, and its link to the represented object is no less intimate and direct. The mind, or myself, Descartes says, is what the objects of my thought are represented to. My mental acts serve to represent things, but they represent them to me.[73]

Because ideas(m) represent ideas(o) to the mind, the thinking subject is not related to the idea by a different relation. The representation of the idea(o) by the idea(m) is really a <u>presentation</u> to the thinker's mind. The entire relation is one that is totally intramental and, as such, must be distinguished from the

[71] Chappell, p. 189

[72] Ibid., p. 190

[73] Ibid., p. 190

representative relation between the idea(o) and the external object of thought.[74]

Secondly, and most importantly, the appearance or presentation before the mind of this intramental representative relation is a conscious activity of the mind. That is to say, the mind 'perceives' ('understands,' 'intuits' or 'senses') ideas(o) by being aware of them, or having awareness in the mind.[75] It is Chappell's position that 'all these terms designate conscious mental activities or attitudes on the part of the mind. For me to have an idea(o) of the sun, in sum, is for me to be aware of the sun, understanding by the "the sun" here, of course, "the objective sun".'[76]

Chappell has thus demonstrated that this representative relation between an idea(m) and an idea(o) and the mind is constitutive of consciousness. Most importantly, he has shown that what this awareness or consciousness is of is the internal object of thought, or the idea(o). But it is the idea(m) that is the agent that represents that object to me. To have an idea, for Descartes, is to have a perception which in Chappell's words can be described as follows:

> I see the sun; in doing so I have an idea of the sun; and this means, in the terms of the Cartesian theory, both that I have an idea(m) and--in a different sense of the phrase--that I have an idea(o). In addition, Descartes would say, I perceive my idea of the sun and thus am conscious of it as well. In this case, however, it is only the idea(o) of which I am conscious, and not the idea(m). The object of my awareness--what I perceive --is

[74] Chappell, p. 190

[75] Ibid., p. 190

[76] Ibid., p. 192

> the objective sun; it is not my perceptual state or my being aware.[77]

In other words, according to Descartes, to have an idea of something is to have a perception of an internal object of thought. Furthermore, it is the idea(o) or the internal object of thought that is perceived, not the idea(m). The importance of this conclusion will be demonstrated in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

### 3. What A Materially False Idea Is

On the basis of the material in the preceding section, I am now able to say what a materially false idea is. A materially false idea is an idea which I perceive to have objective reality when in fact, in actuality, it does not. In other words, in partial opposition to Wilson's claim that an idea has representative character yet lacks objective reality, I hold that a materially false idea has representative character and purports to have objective reality. Furthermore, the condition for the possibility that this idea purports to have objective reality is that the idea has representative character. I will show that the representative relation involved here is an intramental relation, namely between an idea(m) and an idea(o).

[77] Chappell, p. 192

When I have an idea of heat, for example, I take this idea to be one in which objective reality is present, when in fact, objective reality is not actually present. I maintain that it is not Descartes' position that a materially false idea appears to lack objective reality; nowhere in his works does Descartes claim this to be the case. What he does claim is that the idea contains so little clarity and distinctness that he is unable to tell whether it is an idea of a real quality or not.(CSM II, 30) I argue that what Descartes means here is that the objective content is so little clear and distinct that one is unable to assess whether or not the presence of objective reality is actual or not. The reason the objective content of the idea is so little clear and distinct is that the idea of heat is taken to be a quality of a thing and not a sensation. In other words, what the idea is of is referred to something other than that of which it is in truth the idea. What the idea of heat is in truth the idea of is a sensation. An idea of a sensation is not the kind of idea for which the distinction between objective and formal reality arises. The reasons for this will be explored in Chapter III.

Any idea, in order to be an idea at all, must appear to us to be an idea of something. This is to say that it appears to have content, which is in fact to say, it has objective existence or being. Because the idea has objective existence, I mistakenly ascribe objective reality to it, because I take the content to be that of an objective particular property when in fact it is not. That is, I take the content of the idea to be that of a thing when in fact the content of the idea is of a sensation. When I take the content of the idea to be of a thing, the content can be a property of an objective substance or an objective particular property itself.

In the case of a materially false idea, taking the content to have this kind of objective existence is fallacious. But how can I take the content fallaciously? Because I perceive the property of reality to be in the content of the idea when in actuality it is not there; it is the idea(m) which fallaciously represents reality to be in the content, that is, in the idea(o). And this is why the idea is materially false. The representative relation is indeed responsible for the material falsity, but the representative relation involved is the intramental representative relation and not the extramental representative relation. As such, the idea(o) has no reference to the truth or falsity of the extramental object of thought, or the actual or formal object of thought.

This, I argue, is what Descartes tells us a materially false idea is. In the Conversations with Burman, Descartes responds to the objection that 'since all error concerning ideas comes from the relation and application to external things, there seems to be no subject-matter for error if the ideas are not referred to externals.' (CB15) Descartes explains that

> Even if I do not refer my ideas to anything outside myself, there is still subject-matter for error, since I can make a mistake with regard to the actual nature of the ideas. For example, I may consider the idea of colour, and say that it is a thing or quality; or I may say that the colour itself, which is represented by this idea, is something of the kind. For example, I may say whiteness is a colour; and even if I do not refer it to anything outside myself--even if I do not say or suppose that there is any white thing--I may still make a mistake in the abstract with regard to whiteness itself and its nature or the idea I have of it. (CB 15).

It is clear that what Descartes is saying here is that the mistake I make is with regard to the objective content of the idea. I take the content to be representative of a thing when in fact it is not. Furthermore, this materially false idea can provide the material for false judgement (error), because once we

have taken the idea to have objective reality, we then look for the cause or the formal reality of the idea. The idea is materially false precisely because we perceive it to have a reality that in fact it cannot have. And because the idea is obscure and confused, we cannot clearly and distinctly perceive what degree of objective reality it does have. If we clearly and distinctly perceive the content of the idea, then we will see that there is no actual amount of objective reality to assess. So, in a sense, I am in agreement with Wilson that a materially false idea is an idea which has representative character yet lacks objective reality; that is why I earlier used the phrase 'in partial opposition to Wilson's claim.' However, as I have said, what makes the idea materially false is that I perceive reality to be represented to me in the content of the idea when, in fact, no reality is actually present. And it is in this important regard that my argument is opposed to that of Wilson's as she does not make the 'apparent/actual' distinction that I make.

The description of the nature of a materially false idea serves to explicate one part of Descartes' position; how a materially false idea presents itself to the thinker still requires an explanation. I shall deal with this latter issue in Chapter III. For the present, I will provide textual support for the distinction between an idea(m) and an idea(o) which, in turn, will support my argument that the representative character of an idea that allows material falsity to come to be is that of an idea(m) and that what it represents is an internal object of thought, namely an idea(o). Following this, I will examine Wilson's argument, and show how the conclusion she reaches is incorrect.

Apart from the textual support already cited by Chappell, there are

additional places in Descartes' texts where he makes the distinction between an idea(m) and an idea(o). In the reply to Caterus, Descartes responds to the charge that since an idea is merely conceived and is not actual, that is, since an idea is a being objectively located inside the intellect and not a being formally located outside the intellect, it therefore can be conceived, but it cannot be caused.(CSMII, 75) Descartes asserts that the issue to be dealt with is the cause of the idea being conceived, and the conceptual entity he is interested in is the objective aspect of the idea, namely the idea(o). He explains,

> Thus if someone possesses in his intellect the idea of a machine of a highly intricate design, it is perfectly fair to ask what is the cause of this idea. And it will not be an adequate reply to say that the idea is not anything outside the intellect and hence that it cannot be caused but can merely be conceived. For the precise question being raised is what is the cause of its being conceived. (CSM II, 75)

In this passage, what the 'idea is of' refers to the objective content of the idea. We already know that whatever is perceived objectively in an idea has objective existence in the idea. And we also already know that what is at issue for Descartes is: what is the origin of the content of an idea? He explains to Caterus that what he is interested in is the origin of an idea(o); and not the origin of an idea(m).

> Nor will it suffice to say that intellect itself is the cause of the idea, in so far as it is the cause of its own operations; for what is at issue is not this, but the cause of the objective intricacy which is in the idea. (CSMII, 75)

In response to Mersenne's objection that the idea of God is simply a conceptual entity and, as such, cannot contain more perfection than any other idea, (CSMII, 88) Descartes replies that

> If by 'conceptual entity' is meant something which does not exist, it is not true that the idea of God is a conceptual entity in this sense. It is true only in the sense in which every operation of the intellect is a conceptual entity, that is, an entity which has its origin in thought. (CSMII, 97)

This is to say that ideas(m) possess formal and not objective reality, and the origin or cause of an idea(m) is not what is at issue. Rather Descartes affirms that

> I have already insisted in various places that I am dealing merely with the objective perfection or reality of an idea; and this, no less than the objective intricacy in the idea of a machine of very ingenious design, requires a cause which contains in reality whatever is contained merely objectively in the idea. (CSM II, 97)

It is clear from Descartes' reply to Caterus that what he is interested in is the cause or origin of the objective content of the idea, namely an idea(o).

Descartes' project of establishing the objective validity of an idea depends on establishing the relation between objective and formal reality, or the idea(o) and its possible actual counterpart. This is clear from his response to Arnauld's charge that in speaking of a materially false idea, Descartes confuses a judgement with an idea. He replies that it is Arnauld who confuses a judgement with an idea because he takes the idea to represent something located outside thought. Descartes explains the distinction thusly,

> Since ideas are forms of a kind, and are not composed of any matter, when we think of them as representing something we are taking them not materially but formally. If, however, we were considering them not as representing this or that but simply as operations of the intellect, then it could be said that we were taking them materially, but in that case they would have no reference to the truth or falsity of their objects. (CSM II, 163)

The point is that when we think of ideas as representing something extramentally, we are taking them formally. This is to say we are taking the idea(o) and its relation to an extramental counterpart. When we talk about an idea representing a thing as something or other, then we are talking about the idea in the formal sense. When we are talking about an idea in the material sense, '...[these ideas]

have no reference to the truth or falsity of their objects'.(CSM II, 163) Regardless of the truth or falsity of the extramental object of the idea, the idea in the material sense remains the same. But this same idea

> can provide subject-matter for error if it is in fact true that cold is an absence and does not have as much reality as heat; for if I consider the ideas of cold and heat just as I received them from my senses, I am unable to tell that one idea represents more reality to me than the other. (CSM II, 163)

Here, Descartes is not making a distinction between an idea(m) and idea(o), but rather a distinction between intramental representation and formal representation. It is the confusion of these two senses of representation that caused Wilson to conclude that materially false ideas are what she says they are.

## 4. Material Falsity and Objective Reality

In light of the foregoing analysis, I will give grounds for my rejection of Wilson's position that a 'materially false' idea has representative character but lacks objective reality. At the beginning of this chapter, I outlined the basis of her argument. Wilson claims that on Descartes' account, a materially false idea both (i) represents a non-thing as if a thing, and (ii) proceeds from nothing (or has no real cause). Because the assumption has been that all ideas have 'representative character' (which means the idea will have representative content), the assumption then extends to the claim that the content must be 'positive' in nature. If the idea has content then, given Descartes' fundamental principles,

this content cannot proceed from nothing.[78] Wilson argues that materially false ideas have content. 'Since all ideas are "as it were images of things", even those that are really of non-things present themselves as if images of things'.[79] Consequently, Wilson argues Descartes' position to be contradictory when he claims that an idea has positive content and proceeds from nothing. She describes a materially false idea as follows:

> If 'in fact' light, color, heat, cold and so forth are 'nothing real' or 'non things', the ideas that represent these 'qualities' as if they were real are to this extent materially false. In other words, the fact that an idea has representational character--that it presents itself as if exhibiting something to the mind, or making it cognitively accessible--leads us falsely to suppose that it does make something real cognitively accessible to us.[80]

This passage allows me to conclude that Wilson takes the representational character of ideas to be responsible for the material falsity of an idea. That is, because the idea represents 'as if a thing' what is in fact a 'non-thing', the idea is materially false.

[78] It should be noted that in Descartes' examples of materially false ideas, he often uses the ideas of heat and cold. In so doing, he speaks of the possibility of cold being in truth a privation of heat or an absence of heat. But as Wilson rightly points out, 'the notion of privation is not as essential to the argument as it may at first appear. If cold is "merely a privation of heat" then it is not "something positive"--but heat is. However, Descartes is really saying here that none of the qualities mentioned need be "real". This is the real objective of the distinction between properties that are clearly and distinctly perceived in bodies and those which are not. The distinction between private and positive qualities would be familiar to Descartes' scholastic audience'.(see Wilson, p. 109) I would add that in the Regulae, Descartes' tell us that privations and negations can be included among the simple notions that are known intuitively. 'For when I intuit what nothing is...my apprehension is as much genuine knowledge as my understanding what existence is, or duration, or motion.' (CSM I, 45)

[79] Wilson, p. 114

[80] Ibid., p. 109

Wilson argues that, for Descartes, the representational character of ideas of sense is related to erroneous judgment, because we '...suppose that objects are as our ideas 'exhibit' [represent] them.' [81] She supports this assertion with his claim that the most '...frequent error which can be found in [ideas is] that I judge ideas which are in me to be similar or conformable to certain things posited outside me.'(CSM II, 26) Wilson holds that this relation between the representational character of an idea and erroneous judgement illustrates Descartes' interest in emphasizing the distinction between ideas and their objects,...between 'perceptions (as states of the self) and the 'external' objects that we take ourselves to perceive'.[82] Furthermore, argues Wilson, this representationalism 'in virtue of which the mind is supposed to apprehend things by means of the thoughts or ideas distinct from the things'[83] is also a further confirmation for Descartes that our common-sense inference from ideas to things is indeed wrong. Given Wilson's description in the foregoing, I conclude it to be her view that: it is the representational character that allows an idea to be materially false and that it is, therefore, also the representational character of ideas that leads one to make erroneous judgements.

According to Wilson, the representational character of ideas is the vehicle Descartes employs to introduce the concept of objective reality. Because the material falsity of an idea, (namely that it represents something as real that is not real) derives from an idea's representative character, Wilson claims that

[81] Wilson, p. 103

[82] Ibid., p. 104

[83] Ibid., p. 105

the concept of material falsity '...forces us to recognize a distinction between the representative character of an idea and its objective reality'.[84] As a result, argues Wilson,

> [Descartes'] claim that an idea or thought is 'of a thing'(res) must be distinguished both from the claim that it represents something that in fact exists, and from the claim that it has representational character. An idea may have representational character, yet fail, in the relevant sense, to represent any thing.[85]

It seems to me that without naming or describing them, Wilson here identifies the two senses of the representative relation between an idea and its object to which I have earlier referred. An idea has representational character when it represents an internal object of thought (an idea (o)). But the thing that is represented in the content of the idea may or may not have actual existence outside the intellect. This latter representative relation is between the content of the idea (idea(o)) and the extramental or actual existent. When Descartes says that an idea is 'of a thing', he is making the claim that the idea has representational content, regardless of the truth or falsity of the extramental existent. The representative relation involved in the notion that an idea has representational character is one between the idea(m) and the idea(o). While Wilson does not say this,[86] she is, nevertheless, making this same distinction in

[84] Wilson, p. 106

[85] Ibid., p. 108

[86] In a footnote to her analysis of materially false ideas, Wilson claims that it would be important to examine the relation between the representative character of an idea and its representative content. (see pg. 233) I will discuss both her claim and the relation between these two feature of an idea in greater detail in Chapter III.

the above passage when she argues that for an idea to be of a thing is not the same as representing something located outside the intellect or having a representational function.

As we know, Descartes' aim in examining the ideas of objects is to discover some property within the idea that could not have been caused by himself, i.e. a degree of 'objective reality' such that its cause, or 'formal reality' could not be contained within himself, thereby allowing him to conclude that something beyond himself exists. And as Wilson affirms, it is Descartes' position that 'reality' refers to possible existence (not actual existence). In the case of clear and distinct ideas, there is no doubt that the idea represents an object with possible existence.(CSM II,83) But, as Wilson explains, from obscure and confused ideas, we 'cannot tell' whether or not they represent a possible object. We know that, for Descartes, certain ideas of corporeal substances are clear and distinct, while other are not. He says of ideas of the various tactile qualities of objects (including light, colour, heat, etc.) that 'I think of these only in a very confused and obscure way, to the extent that I do not even know whether they are true or false, that is, whether the ideas I have of them are ideas of real things or of non− things.'(CSM II, 30)

However, it is also assumed that all ideas are 'of things' because they have representational character.[87] Descartes argues that

[87] Wilson, pp. 107 − 108

> ...since there can be no ideas which are not as it were of things, 'And since ideas, being like images, must in each case appear to us to represent something' [as the French version has it] if it is true that cold is nothing but the absence of heat, the idea which represents it to me as something real and positive deserves to be called false; and the same goes for other ideas of this kind. (CSM II, 30)

As Wilson remarks, given Descartes' position in the above two quoted passages, it seems as if he is contradicting himself. 'For he seems to be saying <u>both</u> that his ideas of light, color and so forth are of such a nature that he cannot tell whether they represent what is real or not, <u>and</u> that the ideas represent light, color and so forth <u>as real</u>.'[88] But as Wilson then goes on to show, Descartes is not contradicting himself. She argues that because these ideas lack clarity and distinctness, this lack prevents us from drawing conclusions concerning the reality of these ideas. Nonetheless, like all ideas, they present themselves 'like images of things'. And because of this, they can provide the material for error. 'As Descartes explains to Arnauld, to say an idea is materially false is to say that it provides material for falsity in the strict sense, or formal falsity, i.e., it tends to lead its unwary possessor into making false judgements.'[89]

Wilson asks how Descartes can speak of ideas as materially false, when he claims that truth and falsity are only to be found in judgements, in particular, those that relate ideas to something beyond themselves. In other words, how can a falsity exist in ideas, '...when they represent what is not a thing as if a thing'?

[88] Wilson, p. 109

[89] Ibid., p. 109

In the light of my previous analysis, I may now say that a falsity occurs in an idea when it represents what cannot be a possible thing as if it could possibly be a thing. This is to say that an idea is materially false when the internal object of thought is taken to be a possibly existent thing. This can only happen if the property of reality is ascribed to this internal object of thought, because the property of reality in the content of an idea will allow us to conclude to the possible existence of an extramental object. This is not to say that the external object of thought is an actual existent, only that it is a possible existent. But the move to this possibility of existence is only justified if reality is present objectively in the content of the idea.

When Descartes explains the relation between the representational character of an idea and material falsity, he says 'since there can be no ideas which are not as it were of things, if it is true that cold is nothing but the absence of heat, the idea which represents it to me as something real and positive deserves to be called false, and the same goes for other ideas of this kind.' (CSMII, 30) Given my account of the two senses of representation, I may re-cast this statement as follows: ('there can be no ideas that are not as it were of things') <u>means</u> 'there can be no idea(m) which does present an internal object of thought to me (an idea(o))'; ('if it is true that cold is nothing but the absence of heat') <u>means</u> 'if it is true (formally) that cold is nothing else than the privation of heat'; and ( 'the idea which represents it to me as something real and positive, deserves to be called false') <u>means</u> 'the idea(m) which represents cold to me as an idea(o) having the property of objective reality will be materially false.

It is clear from my analysis that what Descartes means is that the representative relation which allows material falsity to occur is the one between the idea(m) and the idea(o), or between the representative character of the idea and the representative content of that same idea. This is an intramental representation. It should also be clear that only when the content is represented as containing the property of reality (objectively) can the idea be potentially materially false. But it can only be truly materially false when this property of reality is not actually present. Otherwise, any idea which contained the property of reality objectively could be said to be potentially materially false. And this is not exactly what Descartes tells us. He also tells us that the condition for an idea being possibly materially false is that it is confused and obscure.[90]

To Arnauld's questioning as to how a privation could be represented as a positive idea, Descartes' reply is that the idea of cold is not cold itself existing in the mind, but something else we wrongly take for that privation. Wilson interprets Descartes' reply to mean that 'we mistakenly take the sensation to be privation just in the following sense: (1) We in some manner take the sensation to be what is out there when we experience cold; (2) What is out there when we experience cold is a privation'.[91] In opposition to Wilson, I argue that when

[90] In the Third Meditation, Descartes says 'Nor can it be said that this idea of God is perhaps materially false and so could have come from nothing, which is what I observed just a moment ago in the case of the ideas of heat and cold, and so on. On the contrary, it is utterly clear and distinct, and contains in itself more objective reality than any other idea; hence there is no idea which is in itself truer and less liable to be suspected of falsehood.' (CSM II, 31)

[91] Wilson, p. 110

Descartes says that the idea of cold is not cold existing in the mind, he means us to understand that we have wrongly taken the sensation, which exists objectively in the mind, as a quality or property which does not exist objectively in the mind. My position that the quality or property to which I mistakenly ascribe objective reality is not actually present in my mind is supported by Descartes' reply to Arnauld.

> ...it often happens in the case of obscure and confused ideas--and the ideas of heat and cold fall into this category--that an idea is referred to something other than that of which it is in fact the idea. Thus if cold is simply an absence, the idea of cold is not coldness itself as it exists objectively in the intellect, but something else, which I erroneously mistake for this absence, namely a sensation which has no existence outside the intellect. (CSMII, 163)

Let me re-cast this statement: What the idea is in fact of is an idea of a sensation. But I do not take the idea as an idea of a sensation, I take the idea to be an idea of an objective particular property, namely cold. In this way, I have referred the idea to 'something other than that of which it is in fact the idea.' What exists objectively in the mind is a sensation of coldness, but I do not take it as this. Because the idea is an idea of a sensation, it is not the kind of idea for which the distinction between objective and formal reality can arise.

While Wilson claims that the material falsity in an idea derives from its representational character, she understands Descartes' to claim that the content of a materially false idea proceeds from nothing, in so far as it has no real cause. The passage on which she founds this claim reads:

> If they [ideas] are false, that is, represent non-things, I know by the natural light that they arise from nothing--that is, they are in me only because of a deficiency and lack of perfection in my nature. (CSM II, 30)

Wilson interprets this passage to mean that as sensations, or modes of thought, these ideas have positive formal reality, but from the cognitive point of view,

> from the point of view of content, or 'objective reality', sensations are mere nothings. They do not require a positive cause, and may be said to arise from 'some defect in my nature'...But notice that the view that sensations, from the objective point of view, are 'caused by nothing' has an interesting and surprising implication: sensations must lack objective reality, despite having representative character.[92]

And this, Wilson concludes, is an incoherent position.

In the light of my previous analysis, one can see where Wilson has mistaken Descartes' intention with regard to the cause of the content of a materially false idea. Firstly, Wilson is correct in asserting that as modes of thought, ideas of sensations have positive formal reality. In other words, an idea(m) (as we have seen) has formal reality. But from the cognitive point of view, namely from the point of view of objective content, there is no objective reality that will allow us to conclude to an extramental representation. It is my argument, contrary to Wilson, that Descartes' is not saying the materially false idea has no positive content. Rather, he is saying that the materially false idea has no actual objective reality present in the idea. As such, the objective reality that is thought to be present in the idea does not have a real cause, namely an extramental cause, but arises from a defect in his nature, namely a mistaken perception that reality is actually represented in the content of the idea.

[92] Wilson, p. 111

Notice what Descartes writes in the passage quoted above. 'If [these ideas] do not represent things, the light of nature makes known to me that they proceed from nothing, that is, they are not in me on account of any other cause...' When he makes the claim 'if they do not represent things', he is referring to the intramental representative relation. In addition, he claims that what is false in the idea is within the idea, not in its relation to any possible extramental existent. If objective reality is mistakenly perceived as being present in the objective content of the idea, the source of this reality cannot be a formally real thing, it must originate within himself. For we have already seen that if an idea does not actually have objective reality, then there cannot be an extramental formal reality that is its cause. And the reason these ideas are caused by nothing, or proceed from nothing, is that the objective reality perceived is not actually there.

How do we make a mistake about the amount of reality exhibited by an idea? I maintain that Descartes answers this by telling us that we do not have a clear and distinct perception of the content of a materially false idea. This is because the content of the idea is itself obscure and confused. But the mistake we make is a mistake that occurs 'within' the idea, that is, without reference to the truth or falsity of any external object. As I have argued, the idea(m) mistakenly represents objective reality to be present in the idea(o). Because we do not take the objective content to be what it actually is, i.e. a sensation, we ascribe the property of reality to what we have mistakenly taken to be a thing or a quality of a thing. I hold that it is plausible to infer that Descartes' position is that a sensation is not a thing. I will argue this claim in more detail in Chapter III.

I conclude, therefore, that a materially false idea is an idea which has representative character and that it is this representative character which is responsible for fallaciously representing objective reality as present in the objective content of the idea. In other words, the idea(m) represents objective realilty as present in the idea(o). And when we recall Chappell's conclusion that while the idea(m) represents the idea(o) to me, what is perceived by me is not the idea(m) but the idea(o). In other words, what I perceive is what is represented to me as present in the objective content of the idea. When the nature of a materially false idea is understood in the way I have described it, then the confusion surrounding Descartes' account will dissolve.

In Chapter III, I will demonstrate the way in which a materially false idea occurs. This exposition will also address the distinction between what is 'thought' to be present and what is 'actually' present in the objective content of the idea. As a result, I will be able to exonerate Descartes from Wilson's charge that he alters his position given in the Meditations, (that a materially false idea proceeds from nothing) to the position given initially in his reply to Arnauld and expanded in the Principles, namely, that the material falsity of an idea derives from its obscurity and confusion.

## CHAPTER III

### I. The Source of Material Falsity in an Idea

In my second chapter, I argued that objective reality is not actually present in the objective content of a materially false idea; however, it is perceived to be present in so far as the idea(m) represents reality to be present in the idea(o). It is this fallacious representation that is responsible for the material falsity in the idea, that is, when a non–thing is represented as if a thing. Since material falsity is ascribed to an idea (as opposed to a judgement about the relation of the content and its formal counterpart), then the kind of reality which is mis–represented is objective reality. The mistaken perception of objective reality in the content of the idea gives rise to a fallacious inference to extramental existence, when we judge that the idea represents a possible extramental existent.

In addition, I made it clear in Chapter II that a mistake is made about the presence of reality in an idea because the content of the idea (idea (o)) is taken to be representative of a thing and not of a sensation. This, I showed, is what Descartes means when he says that we make a mistake with regard to the nature of the idea (CB, 15); it also explains what Descartes means when he speaks about referring the content of an idea to something other than that of which it is in fact the idea.(CSM II, 163) To raise this issue is to address the question as to how Descartes' intends a 'non–thing' to be understood. Since I have argued that material falsity is the representation of a thing (or a mode of a thing) which

has no possible existence as if it is a thing (or a mode of a thing) which has possible existence, then one would conclude that a non-thing is a thing (or a mode of thing) that is not real. However, I will argue in this chapter that part of the confusion surrounding Descartes' concept of materially false ideas arises from a confusion as to how Descartes' intends a non-thing to be understood. I will demonstrate that a non-thing is not simply a thing that is not real, a non-thing is not even a thing.

Up to this point in my thesis, I have described what is mistaken in a materially false idea, namely the fallacious ascription of objective reality to the content of the idea. I have yet to explicate how the content (idea(o)) can be taken to be something that it is not, thereby allowing one to mistake a non-thing for a thing and, subsequently, to make a mistake about the actual presence of objective reality in an idea. This explication will be the subject matter of this final chapter.

Of course, the possibility that one can make a mistake as to whether or not objective reality is actually present in the content of an idea poses serious problems for Descartes. As Wilson argues, if 'we may make mistakes about the amount of reality exhibited [represented] by ideas, such as that of cold [because they represent a non-thing as if a thing], then how do we know that the idea of God, for example, actually does contain infinite objective reality.'[93] I hold that Descartes is well aware of this problem and attempts to avoid it. We have seen

[93] Wilson, p. 114

that if the perception is clear and distinct, this type of mistake cannot be made. For whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived in an idea can be said to be true of the idea. Nonetheless, we know obscure and confused ideas could be materially false.[94] Since I have argued that the mistaken ascription of objective reality occurs when the idea(m) represents reality to be present in the idea(o), the question to be addressed is in what way the representative character of an idea is related to the obscurity and confusion of the content of the idea. I will respond to this question by returning to the claims made by Wilson which I outlined in Chapter II.

As we saw in Chapter II, Wilson argues that Descartes alters his position on the source of materially false ideas from that given in the Meditations. Her claim is that, in the Third Meditation, material falsity is said to derive from the representative character of an idea (because it represents a non-thing as if a thing). In his reply to Arnauld, however, Descartes claims that ideas are materially false because they are obscure and confused (not because they

[94] Descartes does say that all obscure and confused ideas can be materially false. In his reply to Arnauld he states that 'ideas which give the judgement little or no scope for error do not seem as much entitled to be called materially false as those which give great scope for error...Confused ideas which are made up at will by the mind, such as the ideas of false gods, do not provide as much scope for error as the confused ideas arriving from the senses, such as the ideas of colour and cold (if it is true that these ideas do not represent anything real). (CSM II, 163) However, I will argue it to be Descartes' position that he is referring here to the objective content of the idea and whether or not the internal object is taken to be a thing or a sensation. I will show that the false ascription of objective reality to the content of the idea is consistent with Descartes' claim that the ideas which give the greatest scope for error are obscure and confused ideas and, because of this, they are potentially materially false.

represent a non-thing as if a thing). Wilson further argues that as a result of the claim made in the Replies, Descartes goes on in the Principles to suggest that not all ideas, in particular ideas of sense, have representative character.[95]

I disagree with Wilson that Descartes' explanation of the source of material falsity signifies a depature from his position of the Meditations. I will demonstrate it to be the case that Descartes is consistent in his account of the nature of materially false ideas in both the Meditations and in his reply to Arnauld: in both, he holds that the obscurity and confusion of the objective content is responsible for the fallacious ascription of objective reality, hence, is the source of material falsity. Contrary to Wilson, it is my position that Descartes attributes the presumed presence of objective reality to the confusion and obscurity of the content of the idea. If the presumed presence is not actual

[95] Wilson, p. 114-15. Recall that Wilson interprets Descartes to say that materially false ideas lack objective reality despite having representative character. This distinction is the basis of her claim that Descartes does alter his position with regard to the cause of materially false ideas.(see pp. 35-37 of this thesis) She does herself wonder why Descartes should commit himself to the view that materially false ideas lack objective reality. 'Why doesn't he just say that the confusion of these ideas results from some defect in his nature, and that because they are confused these ideas do not provide a sound basis for inference to the nature of the world. This would allow them to have objective reality, in the way that fictional ideas, such as that of a hippogryph, do.' But as I argued in Chapter II, Wilson has failed to notice the distinction between the apparent presence of objective reality in an idea and the actual presence of it. Given my argument, Descartes must be committed to the lack of actual objective reality in an idea, but not to the apparent presence of it. Such a position demands an explanation as to how this apparent presence is possible. It is my argument that Descartes provides this explanation by showing that the confusion and obscurity of an idea allows this apparent presence to be thought of as existing in the content of the idea.

(not true) then the idea will be, to this extent, materially false.[96] I will also argue it to be Descartes' position that all ideas of sense do have representative character, but only intramentally. Some ideas of sense fail to represent formally, that is, they are not able to represent anything located outside thought. I shall now re-state Wilson's position, and proceed to demonstrate that mine does greater justice to Descartes' texts.

Wilson cites Descartes' response to Arnauld (CSMII, 164) as evidence of his departure from the Meditations position. Arnauld questions Descartes' claim that 'if cold is merely the absence of heat, the idea of cold which represents it to me as a positive thing will be materially false'.(CSM II, 145) Arnauld argues that if the idea of cold is 'coldness itself existing objectively in the intellect', then the thing that exists objectively in the idea must be a positive entity. He explains his objection in the following way:

> ...although it can be imagined that cold, which I suppose to be represented by a positive idea, is not something positive, it cannot be imagined that the positive idea does not represent anything real and positive to me. For an idea is called 'positive' not in virtue of the existence it has as a mode of thinking (for in that sense all ideas would be positive), but in virtue of the objective existence which it contains and which it represents to our mind. (CSM II, 145).

In other words, if the idea of cold represents an absence, then it is a true idea. And if the idea of cold represents a positive entity, then it cannot be

[96] In this way fictional ideas have actual objective reality, whereas materially false ideas do not. Fictional ideas, then, are candidates for objective validity in a way in which materially false ideas are not.

the idea of cold (if cold is, in fact, the absence of heat). Arnauld, like Wilson, interprets Descartes' position to be that the content of the materially false idea proceeds from nothing (or is caused by himself). As a result, Arnauld argues that 'the positive objective being of an idea can come from nothing' (CSM II, 146) and this is a violation of Descartes' fundamental principles.[97]

Descartes replies that Arnauld's question is 'improper' in so far as it is not the positive objective being in an idea that is 'responsible for the idea being materially false', hence the cause of the positive objective being is not at issue.(CSM II, 164). He explains,

> my only reason for calling the idea 'materially false' is that, owing to the fact that it is obscure and confused, I am unable to judge whether or not what it represents to me is something positive which exits outside my sensation. And hence I may be led to judge that it is something positive though in fact it may merely be an absence. (CSM II, 164)

It is on the basis of this reply to Arnauld that Wilson concludes Descartes alters his position on which feature of an idea is responsible for its material falsity. She argues that now 'ideas are said to be materially false merely because they are obscure--not because they represent non-things as if they are things'.[98] In making this assertion, Wilson argues that Descartes 'seems simply to abandon the view that the representative character of ideas of sense (which is surely

[97] The violation of these fundamental principles of Descartes' was addressed in Chapter II. (see pp.35 and 59-68).

[98] Wilson, p. 115

something 'positive') is a source of our mistaken beliefs about the real qualities of objects'.[99] In opposition to Wilson, I hold it to be Descartes' position that the objective content of the idea is obscure and confused because the materially false idea is taken to be representative of an objective particular property (for example, cold). This mis-representation includes the ascription of objective reality as a property of cold thereby making one unable to judge whether or not the content is representative of a real extramental object. The material falsity of the idea is derivative of the representational character (that a non-thing is represented as a thing), but this ascription of reality occurs because the internal object is taken to be a thing and not a sensation.

As Descartes explains to Arnauld, the materially false idea does not result from any positive entity; 'it arises solely from the obscurity of the idea--although this does have something positive as its underlying subject, namely the actual sensation involved'. (CSM II, 164) The actual sensation is the formal reality which is responsible for the objective content in the idea. This is a significant point because it means that the idea of cold is, in an important way, related to whatever cold is. In other words, there is no confusion that the idea is 'about cold'; confusion exists about what the internal object 'cold' (idea (o)) actually is. As I have argued, it is Descartes' view that the idea of cold is actually an idea of the sensation of cold and not an idea of a thing (or mode of thing). The confusion in a materially false idea is a confusion about the internal

[99] Ibid., p. 115. This departure from his Meditations position is given as support for her claim that Descartes is committed to the fact that materially false ideas lack objective reality. Rather than alter this position, Wilson claims that Descartes alters his position that all ideas, particularly ideas of sense, have representative character.

object of thought. A careful reading of Descartes' explanation to Arnauld reveals this to be the case. Descartes asserts that the actual sensation is a positive entity and,

> this positive entity exists in me, in so far as I am something real. But the obscurity of the idea is the only thing that leads me to judge that the idea of the sensation of cold represents some object called 'cold' which is located outside me; and this obscurity in the idea does not have a real cause but arises simply from the fact that my nature is not perfect in all respects. (CSM II, 164)

From this passage, it is clear that for Descartes the idea he actually has of cold is an idea of a sensation of cold. What is obscure in the content of the idea (and what Descartes tells us has 'no real cause') is both the object as a thing and the property of reality ascribed to it. As a result, the content is taken to be capable of representing an object located outside of his mind to which this property can be formally ascribed. As I have argued, the ground for the inference of formal representation is the presumed presence of objective reality in the content of the idea. It is because of this presumed presence of objective reality that a materially false idea can provide the subject matter for error, namely, when we erroneously judge that the idea of cold represents an object (outside of thought) that is actually cold.

I maintain that Descartes' position is rendered consistent when the criterion of clarity and distinctness is applied to ideas. When one examines the content of the idea, then the content is seen to be spurious. In other words, the difficulty emerges once the following question is asked: what is the cause of the objective reality that appears to be present in the content of this idea? This connects with Descartes' reply to Caterus that what is at issue is the cause of the objective reality conceived in the idea. (CSM II, 75). In this reply, Descartes tells us

that what exists objectively in the intellect by means of an idea (that is, whatever has objective existence in the understanding), is 'something real which is distinctly conceived.'(CSM II, 75) In the case of a materially false idea, the reply to the above question is that objective reality has no real cause, but arises from a defect in my nature. This amounts to the same assertion made by Descartes in the Meditations: a materially false idea proceeds from nothing in so far as the objective reality represented to me as present in the content of the idea is not actually present. If the reality is not actually present, it cannot be clearly and distinctly perceived. When I demonstrated in Chapter II that Wilson's assertion of an incoherence in Descartes' account of the nature of materially false ideas was incorrect, I showed that what 'proceeds from nothing' is not the actual objective content of the idea but the presumed presence of objective reality in this content. In other words, the objective reality apparently present in the idea has no real cause. In view of what I have just outlined in this paragraph, I may now say that, for Descartes, only that which is clearly and distinctly perceived in the content of the idea will be both true and real. This is supported by Descartes' assertion in the Discourse on Method, when he tells us that 'falsity' proceeds from nothingness. He explains, 'If we...have ideas containing some falsity, this can happen only because there is something confused and obscure in them, for in that respect they participate in nothingness, that is, they are in us in this confused state only because we are not wholly perfect'.(CSM I, 130)[100]

[100] This connects with Descartes' assertion that the cause of error is never in the object but in the thinker.

Wilson argues that if material falsity arises from the obscurity of the idea then a new set of problems emerge. 'For now the same feature of ideas, their "obscurity", is being assigned the tasks of explaining both why I "cannot tell" whether or not the idea exhibits something real, and why I judge that it does.'[101] Given my argument regarding the two senses of representation which Descartes' implicitly employs, the two-fold task 'assigned' to this obscurity is now explicable. It is the obscurity that results from the intramental or material representation that prevents Descartes from telling whether or not the idea exhibits something real, and it is the incorrect inference to the extramental or formal mode of representation that allows him to erroneously judge that it does present something real. The incorrect application of the principle of causality from the objective reality of the idea to the formal reality of a possible existent extramentally is made because the mis-representation first occurs within the idea itself, namely in the representative relation between an idea(m) and an idea(o). This mis-representation on the intramental level, as it were, occurs because the content is not taken for what it actually is, namely a sensation. Instead, the content is taken to be a 'thing', which it is not. The resulting obscurity of the content of the idea allows one to make the mistaken inference to extramental existence. What is obscure is the idea(o) (or what is not distinct), and it is made obscure by the mistaken perception of objective reality in it.

[101] Wilson, p. 115

There is additional support for my interpretation when we turn to what Descartes says about error. Error, which applies to judgement, and hence to the formal mode of representation, 'arises only when, as often happens, we make a judgment about something even though we do not have an accurate perception of it.' (Pr. 32). For example, if we judge that the idea of heat which we have within us resembles or is conformable to an extramental object which has the property or quality of heat, then we have erred. The inaccurate perception that is responsible for the formal error cannot be that the idea of heat falsely represents the external object because we cannot move to the possibility of this representative relation until we have first perceived, either mistakenly or clearly, that the requisite objective reality is present in the content of the idea of heat.

2. Representative Character, Content and Objective Reality

Since I have argued that Descartes' position regarding the source of materially false ideas does not depart from that presented in the Meditations, then new questions emerge: These are: if a materially false idea lacks objective reality, then must these same ideas (i) lack representative character and (ii) lack objective content? In other words, is it Descartes' view that some ideas are not truly ideas, that is, that they are not 'as if the image of a thing'?

For this part of my inquiry, it is necessary to examine further the relation between the representative character of an idea (an idea(m)) and its representative content (idea(o)). Wilson herself raised some of the relevant questions regarding this relation:

> for an idea to be as if an image of a thing, must it in some sense purport (perhaps fallaciously) to exhibit a possibility to us? And does this connect with Descartes' claim that every idea contains the thought of existence of its object, and that possibility is really contained in (not merely 'thought in') every distinct idea?[102]

If it is the case that for an idea to be an idea at all it must appear to us to represent something (or be 'as-if of a thing'), then the idea must purport to represent a possibility to us. In that case, every thought will contain the possibility of existence in it, which is to say that every idea will contain objective reality in it. But then every thought or idea that is 'as if of a thing' will have the potential to be materially false. I will argue that this is what Descartes intends. But notice what he says about these ideas that purport to have reality. 'Possible existence belongs to all the...things of which we have a distinct idea, even to those which are put together through a fiction of the intellect.' (CSMII, 85) And 'existence is contained in the idea or concept of every single thing, since we cannot conceive of anything except as existing' (CSM II, 117) From these passages one might argue that an idea of a sensation, if it can be clear and distinct to any degree, will have objective reality ascribed to it. This is not the path I will go. Instead, I argue it to be Descartes' position that a sensation is to be distinguished from a thing. Because of this distinction, the conditions for the actual presence of objective reality do not apply to sensations.

[102] Wilson, p. 233 fn. Ironically, Wilson poses these quesions in a footnote to her claim that materially false ideas can provide the subject-matter for erroneous judgements because 'all ideas are as if the image of a thing, even those that are really of non-things'. This statement follows her claim that Descartes employs the notion of materially false ideas to explain, in part, why we so regulary do make the inferences that produce our ordinary common-sensical view. (see Wilson, pp. 113-14) Because I hold that she understands the representative character of ideas only to refer to their ability to represent objects formally, I do not think she saw the importance of her questions to the nature of materially false ideas.

Nonetheless, clarity and distinctness as the criterion of truth apply to all ideas, including ideas of sensations.

I have argued that an idea is materially false not only because it actually lacks objective reality but also because it presents itself as if it has objective reality. Given my account, for an idea to be materially false it must have both representative character and objective content. It has been the aim of this thesis to present an account of these three features of an idea , namely, representative character, representative content and objective reality, that are consistent with Descartes' account of a materially false idea. But in what way are they to be reconciled one to the other?. As I see it, there are three alternative responses available. The first is that, according to Descartes, some ideas lack objective reality, and therefore lack objective content and representative content. This is Wilson's position and (as will soon be clear) Normore's as well. The second is that all ideas have objective reality, objective content and representative character. This is Gueroult's position when he argues that the amount of objective reality actually present in a materially false idea is indiscernible. I will present a summary of his view following that of Normore. The third is that some ideas lack actual objective reality yet have presumed objective reality, objective content and intramental representative character. This is my position. While I have defended the first and last of its conditions, I have still to demonstrate what kind of objective (or representative) content a materially false idea can actually have. In other words, I must defend the position that a materially false idea can have objective being without having objective reality. I will defend my position, after I have outlined the first two alternatives.

First: Wilson argues that Descartes is commited to the view that a materially false idea lacks objective reality. This lack of objective reality implies that the objective content 'proceeds from nothing' (because the objective reality has no real cause) which, in turn, brings into question the notion that all ideas have representative character. Her claim is that an interpretation of Descartes can be found to justify the view that not all ideas, in particular ideas of sense, have representative character. As I have shown in my second chapter, she bases her argument (as discussed in Chapter II) on Descartes' reply to Arnauld, and supports it with passages from the Principles--passages which I will discuss when I present my own alternative.

Normore offers a similar interpretation of Descartes. He asks if 'it is of the nature of an idea to have objective reality?' and replies that Descartes' account of materially false ideas entails a negative answer.[103] Normore's conclusion is based on Descartes' reply to Arnauld(CSM II, 164) that if the idea of cold is actually an idea of the sensation of cold then what exists objectively in the understanding is the sensation and not the quality of cold. Normore interprets Descartes' reply to mean that 'the idea of cold does not contain objectively the privation that is cold, but contains a sensation, which is the sort of thing for which the distinction between being objectively and being formally does not arise'.[104] He examines Descartes' view of a sensation and concludes that

> a sensation is a positive being, but it has no being outside the intellect. Suppose then that I feel warm (that there is a sensation of warmth in me). Suppose that I think about it--think, for example, that this sensation of warmth is pleasant. Do I now form an idea in which the sensation of warmth is present

[103] Normore, p. 229

[104] Ibid., pp. 228-29

> objectively?...On the assumption that this is not what would happen, my idea of this sensation of warmth is just the sensation itself...it seems a sensation is an idea of itself. While Descartes never actually says this, he claims that in some cases ideas are not distinct from their objects.[105]

What Normore argues is that if the idea is 'of a thing', (that is, has representative character), then it must have objective reality. In other words, if an idea really represents a thing, then it will contain objective reality. He writes:

> All ideas represent, or purport to be about, something. Some ideas really represent something and it is those which have objective reality...When an idea is clear and distinct, we can see how it represents--whether it represents by presenting us with an object objectively, or simply by itself being an object of a certain kind. Because this distinction is manifest, we can tell when we require an explanation for the objective reality of an idea.[106]

I share Normore's position that those ideas which really represent something will actually contain objective reality; but I stipulate this sense of representation is that of formal (or extramental) representation. In addition, I agree with Normore that all ideas purport to be about something and, (following Chappell's analysis) I take this to mean that all ideas have intramental representative character and thereby must have objective content. Where I again diverge from Normore's conclusion is that I take his assertion that the ideas 'which have objective reality' are the ideas which 'really represent something' to mean that only those ideas which represent a real thing have objective reality. Then the ideas which only purport to represent a real thing will not have objective reality. What I

[105] Normore, p. 229–30. The example Normore uses to illustrate Descartes' position that an idea is not always distinct from its object is the following: 'I claim that we have ideas not only of all that is in our intellect, but also of all that is in the will. For we cannot will anything without knowing that we will it, nor could we know this without an idea; but I do not claim that the idea is different from the action itself'. (K, 93; Letter to Mersenne, 28 January 1641)

[106] Ibid., pp. 230–31

argue is that those ideas which do not represent a real thing can have purported objective reality present in their content. Neither Normore nor Wilson provide for the presence of purported objective reality in the content of an idea (even though they both argue that what makes an idea materially false is that it purports to represent something real). It is Wilson's position to claim that Descartes means that not all ideas have representative character (because some lack objective reality) and it is Normore's position to claim that Descartes means that not all ideas have objective reality (even though they may all have representative character). Neither of their interpretations can adequately account for the nature of a materially false idea. I have already dealt sufficiently with Wilson's arguments. Normore's position seems to have an additional implication. If all ideas have representative character, but only some ideas can truly represent, then presence of objective reality, and not clarity and distinctness, would become the criterion for truth.[107]

[107] Normore himself suggests a similar problem. In part, however, this arises from his equation of objective existence with objective reality. The objective existence, here, though is meant to refer to the external object of thought. Because of Descartes' axiom that 'possible or contingent existence is contained in every idea or concept of a thing', Normore argues that 'thus if an idea has objective reality, and is thus of a thing, that thing possibly exists. This suggests the equation of the objective reality of an idea with the objective existence of its object and the objective existence of an object with the possible existence of that object. The objective reality of an idea of something is then just the possible existence of that thing.' (p. 238) On the basis of this equation of the objective reality of an idea of something with the possible existence of that thing, Normore asks 'how the criterion of clarity and distinctness could work for ideas'. In other words, on the basis of having this particular mental mode, namely, objective reality, how could one tell that some object has possible existence? His reply is to suggest that a move was available to Descartes within the Scholastic tradition whereby to claim that 'the existence of the mode guarantees the possibility of the object is to suppose that the mode just is a contact with the (possible) object'. (p. 238) Rather than argue for the equation of objective existence with objective reality as Normore does, I argue that if the idea is 'as if of a thing' then it can have objective reality, and that, following Chappell's analysis, objective existence and objective reality are not equivalent.

An alternative to their positions is to claim that all ideas, even materially false ones, have objective reality. This is Gueroult's position to which I now turn.

Second: Gueroult argues that sensations are ideas in so far as they have representative character [108] and that material falsity is possible because all sensations possess representative character.[109] Gueroult equates objective being with objective reality, but in a way different from Normore. This equation arises from Descartes' definition of 'objective reality' as 'the being of the thing which is represented by an idea, in so far as this exists in the idea' (CSM II, 113) Although Gueroult never makes the distinction between objective being and reality that Chappell does, he is led to the same conclusion, namely, that whatever exists in the object of the idea has some degree of reality. But in the case of materially false ideas, (which represent 'what is nothing as if it were something') Gueroult questions how it is possible to 'reconcile the attribution of representative character [of ideas, namely, that of sensations, with] the definition of the objective reality of the ideas [in so far as it is "the thing itself such as it is objectively in the understanding"]?' [110]

[108] It is Gueroult's view that what constitutes an idea 'is not the objective validity that it can really possess--its effective correspondence with what is ideated--it is the character it possesses that an internal observation reveals, to be manifest to our consicousness as the picture of something external, even if, in fact, nothing of this kind corresponds to it.'(p. 151) The character which all ideas possess is representative character; any thought which represents something to the mind is an idea.

[109] Gueroult, p. 151

[110] Ibid., p. 151

As Gueroult puts it, the idea of a sensation is a state of consciousness, but it also 'encompasses something other than my mind alone but is not reducible to it'.[111] Thus the content of the idea cannot be accounted for by reference to the operation of the mind alone. He goes on to say that a sensation is the 'result of the substantial union of my soul and my body; it is subjective–objective'.[112] As a result of this union, the idea

> preserves a residue of objective reality––the weakest residue it is possible to conceive––since this representative reality is never a copy of external things...Even though it does not represent things to me, it does refer me to them...It is therefore natural to grant some objective reality to sensation.[113]

Of this residue of objective reality, Gueroult writes that it

> is so small that one can barely distinguish it from nothingness; and one risks mistaking nothingness for being. We are therefore dealing with real differentials of objective reality here, even though Descartes himself did not define such a notion. They are the limit or difference between being and nothingness, and consequently, they are just as easily the one or the other...If, in fact, their objective reality is so small that I cannot know whether it is or it is not, since only what is real is true...[114]

[111] Gueroult, p. 151

[112] Ibid., p. 152

[113] Ibid., p. 152. Gueroult states that it is impossible to think of an idea completely devoid of objective validity (which would be the result of an idea which lacks objective reality). He argues that it is the differences in objective realities in ideas that renders them perceptible and distinct. For example, the ideas of heat and cold 'must therefore contain some objective reality; however little is the (objective) reality contained in "the idea of heat or the idea of a stone...we cannot say that this way or manner of being is nothing at all"'(also see CSM II, 28) This position, of course, depends on the equation of objective existence and objective reality. I will argue that the mode of being for a sensation is not the same as it is for a thing.

[114] Ibid., p. 152

While a considerable part of Gueroult's argument requires the equation of objective being and objective reality in the content of the idea (in the manner outlined above), there is support for his interpretation in so far as Descartes never says that a materially false idea lacks objective reality. It is also a way of allowing all ideas to have representative character (to purport to be of a thing) and it means that even this 'purporting' will allow actual objective reality to be present in the idea.

While it is the case that Descartes never says that materially false ideas lack objective reality, the examples he provides of materially false ideas are ideas of sensations and he does say that sensations do not represent anything real. It has been a fundamental tenet of my argument that only those ideas which actually contain objective reality will be capable of actually representing an extramental existent. What Gueroult claims is that sensations, even though they are unable to represent anything located outside thought, still possess a minimal degree of objective reality. However, I think that Descartes implies something that does not agree with Gueroult's interpretation. I will demonstrate that, for Descartes, sensations are a different sort of entity than other objects of perception.

Third: I will now argue that the presence of objective being in the content of the idea does not always require the ascription of objective reality (in the manner in which both Chappell and Gueroult describe it). In the case of ideas of sensations, they will be seen to have being objectively in the content of the idea but it is not the same mode of being that other objects which exist objectively (or representatively) have. An idea of a sensation, then, has objective being and therefore objective content but not objective reality. And this is why

they cannot represent any thing located outside thought. A sensation is the kind of entity (or non-thing) for which the ascription of reality cannot arise.

I have argued that a materially false idea has objective being. In fact, this objective being is necessary in order that the idea be materially false. An idea must have objective content in order that it can be materially false, because it is only on the basis that it has some objective content (or being) that I can mistakenly ascribe objective reality to be present. It is not my position that an idea can lack objective being and still have objective reality mistakenly ascribed to it. And I am arguing that the internal object of thought (for example, an objective particular property) to which the objective reality is mistakenly ascribed cannot have objective being. (If it had objective being, then reality would be ascribed to it). In what way then can a materially false idea have objective being?

Given Descartes' principles that 'when we say that something is contained in the nature or concept of a thing, this is the same as saying that it is true of that thing, or that it can be asserted of that thing',(CSM II, 114) and that whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived is true, I must establish that an idea of a sensation can be clearly and distinctly perceived. I hold it to be Descartes' position that an idea of a sensation can be clearly and distinctly perceived as long as it is taken as a sensation and not as a thing.

It is undoubtedly Descartes' position that sensations can be clearly and distinctly perceived, and that whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived is true. In the Principles, he tells us that

> as for our senses, if we notice anything here that is clear and distinct, no matter whether we are awake or asleep, then provided we separate it from what is confused and obscure we will easily recognize--whatever the thing in question--which are the aspects that may be regarded as true. (CSM I, 203, Pr. 30, see also Med. VI, pp.54ff)

Again, in the Principles, Descartes tells us that 'we must be very careful to note that pain and colour and so on are clearly and distinctly perceived when they are regarded merely as sensations or thoughts'.(CSM I, 217, Pr. 68) From these passages, one can conclude that ideas of sense are capable of being true. On this basis, one can also conclude that the idea therefore must have content. Descartes asserts that certain ideas of sense, namely those sensations of 'tastes, smells, sounds, heat, cold, light, colours and so on...do not represent anything located outside thought'.(CSM I, 219, Pr. 71) One can conclude from this that these ideas of sense lack formal representative character, which also tells us that they must lack actual objective reality.

If a sensation lacks objective reality, what kind of content can it possess? Or, in other words, what kind of being can a sensation have? Descartes is not at all explicit as to what kind of 'entity' a sensation is. However, he does offer support for my interpretation that whatever a sensation is, it is not a thing. This support he provides when he describes the various objects of perception, and then he explains that

> All the objects of our perception may be regarded either as things or affections of things, or as eternal truths. But we also experience within ourselves certain other things which must not be referred either to the mind alone or to the body alone. These arise...from the close and intimate union of our mind with the body. This list includes...appetites...emotions...and sensations. (CSM I, 208, Pr. 48).

It is because sensations cannot be referred to a thing (or a mode of a thing) that the distinction between formal and objective reality does not arise. However, an idea of a sensation can be clearly and distinctly perceived. As it cannot be the faculty of perception, or the operation of the intellect, that can incline to falsehood, (in the same way as the faculty of the will cannot incline to falsehood), then as long as the conditions of its operation are met, the idea cannot be, in and of itself, false. In the case of the operation of the intellect, the condition to be met is that of clear and distinct perception. Provided the scope of the intellect 'is limited to what is clearly perceived'(CSM I,207, Pr. 43), there can be no inclination toward falsehood. And Descartes is explicit about the meaning of 'clear' and 'distinct'. A clear perception is one which is 'present and accessible to the attentive mind'(CSM I, 207, Pr.45) while a distinct perception is not only clear but 'is so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear'. (CSM I, 208, Pr. 45)

Descartes does claim that a perception can be clear without being distinct, and he cites the sensation of pain as an example of a perception that can be clear without always being distinct. The clarity of the perception is present, but what is clearly perceived is only the sensation. Descartes tells us that we often confuse the perception of pain with an obscure judgement about an extramental existent that causes the sensation intramentally and resembles the sensation.

> For people commonly confuse this perception with an obscure judgement they make concerning the nature of something which they think exists in the painful spot and which they suppose to resemble the sensation of pain; but in fact it is the sensation alone which they perceive clearly. (CSM I, 208, Pr. 46)

Notice what Desartes has said here. What is confused is the perception of pain as a sensation with the perception of something else in the content of the idea that is not clear and which thereby allows one to make a false judgement. As I have argued, this judgement is only possible if the presence of objective reality is thought to be in he content of the idea.

It is possible, Descartes asserts, to know the content of these sensations clearly.

> These may be clearly perceived provided we take great care in our judgements concerning them to include no more than what is strictly contained in our perception--no more than that of which we have an inner awareness. But this is a very difficult rule to observe, at least with regard to sensations. For all of us have, from our early childhood, judged that all the objects of our sense-perception are things existing outside our minds and closely resembling our sensations, i.e. the perceptions that we had of them. Thus, on seeing a colour, for example, we supposed we were seeing a thing located outside us which closely resembled the idea of colour that we experienced within us at the time. (CSM I,216, Pr.66)

Descartes describes the 'inner awareness' referred to in this passage as 'sensory awareness'. I hold that it is this 'sensory awareness' which Descartes intends as the object of our perception.[115] But due to the preconceived opinions from

[115] In the Passions, Descartes provides an explanation as to what the objects of sensory perception are and how we confuse these objects with the extramental object which caused the sensation. 'The perceptions we refer to things outside us, namely to the objects of our senses, are caused by these objects, at least when our judgements are not false. For in that case the objects produce certain movements in the organs of the external senses and, by means of the nerves, produce other movements in the brain, which cause the soul to have sensory perception of the objects. Thus, when we see the light of a torch and hear the sound of a bell, the sound and the light are two different actions which, simply by producing two different movements in some of our nerves, and through them in our brain, give to the soul two different sensations. And we refer these sensations to the subjects we suppose to be their causes in such a way that we think that we see the torch itself and hear the bell, and not that we have sensory perception merely of movements coming from these objects.' (Passions, Part One, 23, CSMI, 397).

which we operate, we do not refer the content to this awareness. If we limit our perception strictly to the perception of the sensation itself, then we cannot err. But it is our habit to refer the perception of sensation to something other than what it is.

Descartes plainly asserts that a sensation can be distinctly perceived but it cannot have objective reality.

> ...pain and colour and so on are clearly and distinctly perceived when they are regarded merely as sensations or thoughts. But when they are judged to be real things existing outside our mind, there is no way of understanding what sort of things they are. (CSM I, 217, Pr. 68)

Once again, the basis for judging a sensation of colour, for example, to be a property of a thing existing extramentally is that the objective content of the idea of colour must have objective reality. What Descartes tells us is that there is no possibility of objective validity for an idea of a sensation of this kind. He asserts that

> If someone says he sees colour in a body or feels pain in a limb, this amounts to saying that he sees or feels something there of which he is wholly ignorant, or, in other words, that he does not know what he is seeing or feeling...if he examines the nature of what is represented by the sensation of colour or pain--what is represented as existing in the coloured body or the painful part--he will realize that he is wholly ignorant of it. (CSM I, 217, Pr. 68)

From this passage, it is clear that Descartes does not believe that certain ideas of sense can represent formally. It is on the basis of these remarks of Descartes' that Wilson concludes he alters his position about the representational character of ideas of sense.[116] However, as I have argued, when Descartes asserts that certain

[116] Wilson, pp. 116–19

ideas of sense have no capacity to represent anything located outside thought, these are the ideas to which objective reality cannot be actually ascribed. Nonetheless, there is an internal object of thought (namely the sensation) and it is my argument that, whatever kind of object it may be internally, it is not a thing. Descartes does make a distinction between a sensation and a distinct thing. In these cases, he is distinguishing between a thing that exists, (or could exist) outside the mind and a sensation which cannot exist outside the mind. However, my argument is that in order for a thing to exist outside the mind, it must exist as a thing inside the mind. And this is what I take Descartes to assert that a sensation cannot be.

In Principle 70 (CSM I,218–19) he tells us there are 'two ways of making judgements concerning the things that can be perceived by the senses: the first enables us to avoid error, while the second allows us to fall into error'. Descartes explains that

> when we say we perceive colours in objects, this is really just the same as saying that we perceive something in the objects whose nature we do not know, but which produces in us a certain very clear and vivid sensation which we call the sensation of colour.[117]

So we do have an idea or perception of something that is a sensation and the

[117] This connects with Descartes' reply (in CB, 15) where he claims that in the case of materially false ideas, I may make a mistake as to the nature of the idea. He says, 'I may consider the idea of colour, and say that it is a thing or a quality; or I may say that the colour itself, which is represented by the idea is something of the kind.'

object of this idea can be whatever the particular sensation is of, for example, colour. However, Descartes cautions that to move beyond this claim is to move into uncertainty and possibly error. He states

> As long as we merely judge that there is in the objects (that is, in the things, whatever they may turn out to be, which are the source of our sensations) something whose nature we do not know, then we avoid error.(Pr. 70)[118]

What Descartes is saying in this passage is that even though the origin of the sensation is located outside thought, there are no grounds for supposing resemblance between the idea and the external object of that idea. In other words, there are no grounds for the application of the principle of causality. However, he says

> it is quite different when we suppose that we perceive colours in objects. Of course, we do not really know what it is that we are calling a colour; and we cannot find any intelligible resemblance between the colour which we suppose to be in objects and that which we experience in our sensation. (Pr. 70)

[118] Support for my interpretation that certainty can be claimed of sensations is found in Descartes' reply to Mersenne regarding the three grades of sensory response. Of the first grade, Descartes tells us that this response is 'limited to the immediate stimulation of the bodily organs by external objects; this can consist in nothing but the motion of the particles of the organs, and any change of shape and position resulting from this motion'. (CSM II, 294) The second grade of responses is comprised of 'all the immediate effects produced in the mind as a result of its being united with a bodily organ which is affected in this way. Such effects include the perceptions of pain, pleasure, thirst, hunger, colours, sound, taste, smell, heat, cold and the like, which arise from the union and as it were the intermingling of mind and body. (CSM II, 294–95) And it is to the third grade of sensory response that error belongs, as it 'includes all the judgements about things outside us which we have been accustomed to make from our earliest years––judgements which are occasioned by the movements of these bodily organs'. (CSM II, 295) And Descartes claims that of the first two grades of sensory response, 'no falsity can occur in them'. (CSM II, 296)

While Descartes does not tell one how to measure the amount of reality present in an idea, he does tell us that we make assessments of reality based on the degree to which we are affected by it. As a result of this inaccurate assessment , we have learnt (since childhood) to make this mistake of attributing to things qualities that do not belong to them, such as colour and heat. Descartes' states that we confuse non–real qualities with real qualities of things as a matter of habit. 'Since the mind judged everything in terms of its utility to the body in which it was immersed, it assessed the amount of reality in each object by the extent to which it was affected by it.'(CSM I,219)

Descartes does distinguish between the objects of our perception that can have objective reality and those that cannot. He explains that there are some objects of sense perception, like size and shape, 'which we clearly perceive to be actually or at least possibly present in objects in a way exactly corresponding to our sensory perception or understanding'.(CSM II, 218) However, these qualities of objects, Descartes tells us, are presented to the mind 'not as sensations, but as things, or modes of things, existing (or at least capable of existing) outside thought'. (CSM II, 219, Pr. 72) In fact, in childhood one is 'not yet aware of the difference between things and sensations.' (CSM II, 219, Pr. 71) I conclude, therefore, that those objects of our perception which present themselves as things (or modes of things) have objective reality, while those which present themselves as sensations cannot have objective reality.

3. Material Falsity and Truth

To return now to the relation between a quality or property which is thought to be present in an idea and that quality or property actually being present in the idea, one can see that Descartes does make this distinction implicitly. To represent something to me as real and positive is to represent something as containing objective reality, and hence, possible existence. A materially false idea does represent something to me as real and positive, but it does this representing fallaciously. And this is the connection between the representative character, (the idea(m)) and the representative content, (the idea (o)). This representative relation is one which might more accurately be termed 'presentation' to the mind. The nature of an idea(m) is a thought or perception, while its (necessary) function is to represent. What the mind perceives is not the idea(m) but the content of the idea, or the idea(o). In the case of a materially false idea, what is perceived is the presentation of reality ascribed to the content (idea (o)). And as I have argued, what is thought to be presented to the mind is a thing, but what is actually presented to the mind is a sensation. It is only the actual object of thought (the sensation) that possible existence can be attributed to; however, a sensation is not the kind of entity (or does not have the mode of being) that allows this attribution. It may be the case, as Normore argues and as Wilson suggests, that a sensation is not a distinct thing. Even though Descartes' argues that an idea of a sensation can be clearly and distinctly perceived, the entity that can be clearly and distinctly perceived is not a distinct object. If the object of a sense perception is the movement of certain physical forces, etc., then there is nothing distinct to perceive. On a very simple level, it may be that what Descartes is saying all along is that a materially false idea is one which represents

a sensation (a non–thing) as if a thing (distinct object) as an internal object of thought.

One must then ask if merely thinking something to be present in the idea is sufficient ground to make the idea materially false? In other words, is an idea only materially false if we think something to be present that is not actually present? Or does it become materially false when the move is made to formal representation, that is, when we move from the idea being 'as if' of a thing to it being of a thing. It is my position that Descartes intends a materially false idea to be false always when we think objective reality to be present in it,[119] that is because the idea purports to be of a thing. To argue this is to assert that all ideas, in virtue of their representative character, are candidates for material falsity. And I think that Descartes does hold this view, with the essential qualification that if the idea is clear and distinct, then the possibility of material falsity will not exist. For whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived is true, and whatever is true is real. The condition for potential material falsity will then apply to all confused and obscure ideas (all of which can have representative character) and sense perceptions will be candidates for material falsity as long as we continue to take them as things and not as sensations. To take sensations as things is to impose confusion and obscurity on the content of the idea.

[119] The idea is itself false and I am not claiming that the idea only becomes false when a judgement is made concerning the relation between the contents of the idea and an extramental object. Rather, it is at this point that the idea is known to be false. In Descartes' reply to Arnauld, he says that he has used the term 'material falsity' to describe those ideas which can provide subject matter for erroneous judgement in the same way that Suarez used this term in his Metaphysical Disputations. The key passage from Suarez reveals that the idea is itself materially false prior to the exercise of judgement. He says, 'It is this apprehension sort of materially, that is not as someone affirming or proposing something false, but as in a sign, which on its own, signifies what is false'. (I am indebted to Professor M. Tweedale for translating the Suarez passage from the original).

It is also my conclusion that Descartes imposes an additional qualification, about which he is never explicit. In the case of an idea of a sensation, whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived is true but is not real. I do not think this conclusion is devastating. It has been my argument all along that the sense of representation employed between an idea (m) and an idea(o) is an intramental sense, which is really a 'presentation' of an idea to the mind. As such, what is truly presented in the content of the idea is not necessarily an object which can represent anything located outside of thought. In other words, the true content of the idea will have a real cause but the content itself will not be able to represent reality. This amounts to saying that not all ideas are candidates for objective validity and this condition will only apply to particular ideas. These ideas (namely, ideas of sensations) are those which cannot be referred to either the mind or the body alone . And this, I conclude, is Descartes' position.

## 4. Conclusion

It has been the objective of this thesis to present an account of materially false ideas that is consistent with Descartes' theory of the representative character of ideas and his use of the concepts of objective and formal reality. To this end, I have defended him against the charges of incoherence levelled by certain commentators, in particular, M. D. Wilson. This incoherence was said to arise from Descartes' position that a materially false idea (in so far as it represents a non-thing as if a thing) lacks objective reality despite having representative character. The alternatives available to dissolve this incoherence are either (i)

that those ideas which lack objective reality also lack representative character (and, in that sense, are not really ideas), or (ii) that all ideas have representative character and hence objective reality, or (iii) that all ideas have internal representative character, but some ideas lack actual objective reality and hence the ability to formally represent a thing.

Of the first two options, I have demonstrated that they still leave certain problems unresolved. Of the latter position, I have demonstrated that to interpret Descartes' position to be that a materially false idea purports to have objective reality, (but fails to actually have objective reality) is consistent with Descartes' account of the representative character and objective reality of an idea. What remains unresolved in my account is Descartes' intention as to how we are to understand the kind of an 'entity' that a sensation is. It has been my argument that he does not intend us to take a sensation as a thing, but to take it as the sort of 'entity' that cannot be referred either to a thing or an eternal truth. This argument also provides consistency between Descartes' account of a materially false idea and the actual objective (or representative) content of that idea. In this way, the 'entity' that is a sensation belongs to a category in and of itself and remains a sort of aberrration as an object of perception.

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